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PROVIDENCE UNFOLDED:

COMPRISING

THE HISTORY OF PROVIDENCE

AS UNFOLDED IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER;

ALSO,

THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE,

THE GOD OF THE BIBLE.

AND ALSO,

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL,

DEMONSTRATED FROM THE CHARACTER OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE ATONEMENT.

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NEW YORK:
EDWARD H. FLETCHER,
1851.

HISTORY OF PROVIDENCE.

AS UNFOLDED

IN THE

BOOK OF ESTHER.

BY

ALEXANDER CARSON, LL. D.

NEW YORK:
EDWARD H. FLETCHER.
1851.

PROVIDENCE UNFOLDED, &c.

THE great design of this portion of the Holy Scriptures is to display the wisdom, providence, and power of God, in the preservation of his people, and in the destruction of their enemies. We learn from it, that the most casual events which take place in the affairs of the world are connected with his plans respecting his people; and that the most trifling things are appointed and directed by him to effect his purposes. It decides a question that philosophy has canvassed for ages, and never will fathom; recording a number of events, the result of man's free will, yet evidently appointed of God, and directed by his providence. From this book the believer may learn to place unbounded confidence in the care of his God in the utmost danger; and to look to the Lord of omnipotence for deliverance, when there is no apparent means of escape. It demonstrates a particular providence in the minutest things, and affords the most solid answer to all the objections of philosophy to this consoling

truth. The wisdom of this world, with all its acuteness, is not able to perceive how God can interfere on any particular occasion, without deranging the order of his general plans. Philosophers account for the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous, from the operation of general laws. A villain grows rich by industry, and oppresses the virtuous poor; a righteous man loses his all by a storm at sea, or is himself overwhelmed in the ruins of an earthquake. In all this the philosopher's god cannot interfere, for he is tied down by the order of a general providence. He is fettered by his own previously established laws, as effectually as the gods of the heathen were when they swore by the river Styx. He must quietly look on amidst all the occasional mischief resulting from his plans, which, though upon the whole the best possible, yet have many unavoidable defects. Storms and earthquakes result from the operation of general laws established at first by the Author of nature; and the Almighty, it is supposed, without unsuitably counteracting the order appointed by himself, can neither prevent them nor deliver from their dreadful consequences. Famine and war, with all the evils that destroy or afflict men, are accounted for on principles that exclude a particular providence. The arrogance of the oppressor cannot be restrained, nor the sufferings of the virtuous prevented, without an un-

becoming deviation from the order of nature. Philosophy cannot see how her god could dispose every particular event without a miracle on every occasion of interference. On this supposition, she thinks that he must be continually suspending and counteracting the general laws which he at first established for the government of the world.

How different from this philosophic god is the Lord God of the Bible! Jehovah has indeed established general laws in the government of the world yet in such a manner that he is the immediate Author of every particular event. His power has been sometimes displayed in suspending these laws, but is usually employed in directing them to fulfil his particular purposes. The sun and the rain minister to the nourishment and comfort equally of the righteous and the wicked, not from the necessity of general laws, but from the immediate providence of Him who, in the government of the world, wills this result. Accordingly, the shining of the sun and the falling of the rain on the fields of the wicked, are represented in Scripture, not as the unavoidable effect of general laws, but as the design of supreme goodness. A fowling-piece well aimed will strike a particular object; but divine truth has assured us that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the permission of the Ruler of the world. This book teaches us that God exerts his particular provi-

dence in an inconceivably wise and skillful manner, even by the operation of his general laws, and by the exercise of the free determinations of men. The very laws that in the opinion of the philosopher, stand in the way of a particular providence, are here exhibited as the agents that he deputes to effect his purposes. The most astonishing interferences that ever were recorded are here effected solely through the operation of general laws, and the actions of voluntary agents. The people of God are delivered out of the most imminent danger, and their enemies most marvelously overturned, without a single miracle. The glory of the Divine wisdom, and power, and providence shines here the more illustriously, because God effects his work without suspending the laws of nature, or constraining the determination of the agents employed in the execution of his work. He saves them, and destroys their enemies without going out of the usual path of his providence. Had the earth opened and swallowed the enemies of the Jews, the power of Jehovah would have been displayed; but when he saved them by a train of events according to the general laws of nature, each of which separately viewed seems fortuitous, yet when seen in combination must necessarily have been designed to bring about the one great end; the existence of a particular providence is proved, and the nature of it is delight-

fully illustrated. It is not merely taught in doctrine, but it is exhibited in example. In the history of the deliverance of the Jews through the exaltation of Esther, we have the whole history of the world in miniature. The book of Esther is the History of Providence. In the inspired account which we have here of an interesting portion of Jewish story, we have an alphabet, through the judicious use of which we may read all the events of every day, of every age and nation. This is a divine key which will open all the mysteries of providence. It is God's commentary on all that he has done and on all that man has done, since the finishing of the works of creation. All is natural and seemingly fortuitous; yet if the whole had been a work of mere fiction for amusement, the events could not have been better adapted to the end. There is all the simplicity of nature, yet all the surprise and interest of romance. The grand object is evolved like the plot of a regular drama; every event recorded contributes its influence in producing the effect. There is nothing wanting; there is nothing superfluous. Had the most trifling incident refused its aid, the whole plan would have been deranged—the most fatal results would have succeeded. From the first to the last, all parts are connected and influenced like the machinery of a watch. By a thousand wheels the main-spring guides the index. We

have first a train of events to raise up deliverance to the Jews, even before they were brought into danger; next, we have a train of events to bring them to the brink of ruin; then follow the surprising means of their preservation, and the destruction of their enemies. To one or other of these objects every circumstance recorded in the history contributes, and the whole forms one of the grandest displays of the wisdom, power, and providence of God, that is to be met with in the Scriptures, and is well calculated to represent that noble plan by which the kingdom of Satan is overturned, and God's people are delivered from the power of their great enemy, through the very means intended for their utter extirpation.

In reviewing the train of events that provided the means of deliverance for the Jewish nation, before they were brought into danger, the first thing that presents itself is the great feast of Ahasuerus. At first sight nothing could have been more unconnected with the intended object. It is quite a fortuitous and ordinary matter. A royal revel would appear calculated to defeat the designs of Jehovah, rather than fulfil them. But the wisdom and omnipotence of Jehovah can use ordinary events to effect his purpose, and can fulfil his will by a worldly assembly, or even by a synagogue of Satan, as well as by a church of Christ. He reigns as absolutely over his enemies

as among his friends. He works through Satan and his emissaries, as well as through the ministry of the angels of his presence; and employs the councils of sinners, as well as the loyal and loving exertions of saints. The occasion of originating this deliverance to the people of God was a feast to exhibit the glory of a worldly kingdom, and not a religious assembly. God employs his agents in work suitable to their character. Had the wisdom of men formed the plan of deliverance, the monarch would have been made a proselyte to the religion of the Jews, and the work would have been effected by him as a servant of the God of Israel. But God does everything by him while he continues, as far as we are informed, altogether uninfluenced by the law of the Lord of heaven. Had David sat on the throne of Persia, his zeal for the preservation of Israel and destruction of their enemies, could not have flamed with greater ardor than that of Ahasuerus.

What was the particular occasion of this feast we are not informed, and therefore it can be no way useful for our edification. Commentators are usually very obliging with their conjectures on such an emergency, and edify us with many a shrewd guess. But it is the duty of a Christian to learn everything that the Scriptures record; and it is equally his duty to remain in the most obstinate ignorance of everything that they do not reveal.

Whether this was a birth-day, or a feast for commemorating the accession to the throne; whether it was an annual festival, or an occasional revel, I know not—I care not. What I know is, that God had evidently determined it as a link of the wonderful concatenation of ordinary events employed by him to effect his glorious purpose of delivering his people. Though the free appointment of man, it was also the appointment of God. It was necessary to give birth to the events that follow.

The whimsical, tyrannical, and indecent thought that struck the mind of the monarch in his wine, though originating with himself, was according to the appointment of a wise Providence. Why did such a thought come into his mind? It was evidently contrary to the custom of Persia, for Vashti to make such an appearance, as the females on this occasion feasted apart. It was extremely indecorous for the female majesty of the empire to be exposed to the formal survey of such an assembly, heated with wine. The queen's disobedience of the orders of an absolute monarch, accustomed to universal obedience, shows how much the thing required was contrary to the general sentiments of decorum. Had such a thing been usual, it would not have been so offensive to the queen. It may be said, it was a drunken frolic. But was the king never drunk before? Is this the only time that he acted under the influence of wine? Why did the thought strike

him now rather than at any other time of his drinking? Why is it that this is the only instance of the kind on record? God's intention undoubtedly was, that a thing might be enjoined on the queen with which she would not comply, that her disgrace might make way for the exaltation of the deliverer of his people. Yet though in one point of view it was the appointment of God, in another it was the result of the actions of free and voluntary agents. God's purpose is brought about by those whose only view is to fulfil their own purposes. How inscrutable are the mysteries of Providence! how unsearchable are his counsels in the government of the world! Men are his enemies—they hate him, and disobey him; yet in all their plans and actions they fulfil his will. The regularity of the heavenly bodies in their courses is wonderful; but they are not voluntary agents; they are constantly urged on by the hand of their Creator. But men think, and resolve, and act for themselves; yet they fulfil the plans of Jehovah as much as the sun, moon, and stars. His very enemies in opposing him are made the instruments of serving him. How consoling to the believer is this view of Providence! When he looks around him he sees everywhere men trampling on the laws of God, and openly putting dishonor on him. Is God disappointed in the end that he proposed by his works? is he really overcome and thwarted by the prince of darkness? No! Jehovah is executing

his purposes even through the wickedness of men and devils: and all things that have taken place from the creation must minister to his glory. Though Satan has usurped the throne of God in the world for so many thousand years, yet in all this God has been executing his own plans; and he now rules on earth as absolutely and as unreservedly as he does in heaven. This is a depth which we cannot fathom; but it is a truth necessary for the honor of the character of God; and one of which the Scriptures leave no room for doubt. The sin and misery that are on the earth—the endless perdition of wicked men and devils—are subjects of melancholy consideration to the man of God; but let him be consoled with the thought that Jehovah worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, and that the darkest spots on the book of God may appear in the brightness of meridian light in the world of glory. "The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil," Prov. xvi. 4. The Apostle Paul declares that he was a "sweet savor unto God," as well "in those that perish," as "in those that are saved." A fool may ask, How can these things be so? and the wisest man on earth cannot answer him. But is it not enough that God has said it? Shall little children receive the word of their parents with the utmost confidence of conviction, when they testify the most incredible things, and

shall we hesitate to receive the word of the God of truth?

The queen's refusal is another providential circumstance which we are here called to observe and to admire. Notwithstanding the singularity, the indelicacy, and the unreasonableness of the command, it is remarkable that the queen should venture to disobey a despot heated with wine. She could scarcely expect to escape with impunity. Even Esther herself, with all her surpassing beauty, was exceedingly reluctant to venture uncalled into his presence. She was not willing to risk her life on his caprice, whether he would hold out the golden sceptre, or suffer her to perish in her rashness. What, then, must have been the danger of Vashti? what must have been the intrepidity of the daring woman that refused to obey him? Her conduct was singularly bold and imprudent. Her resolution was no doubt suggested by her pride, or by her sense of decorum; but a regard to self-interest is usually stronger than these principles, especially in courts. Why, then, did her delicacy at this time prevail over her prudence? Not one woman in a thousand would have acted in this manner, in the same circumstances. Why then did a woman of such spirit fill the situation of queen at this critical moment? Why was not her beauty accompanied with an abject spirit of servility, as is usually the case among the slaves of eastern des-

pots? The reason evidently is, God had provided this high-spirited woman for the occasion which he meant to serve by her. He had determined her character and conduct as the means of executing his purposes; and by the ordinary course of events, his providence had given a consort to the monarch who was fitted for the part which he designed that she should act. As a voluntary agent she ignorantly fulfilled the will of Him whom she knew not, when she was influenced solely by a regard to her own feelings.

The advice of the king's counsellors on this occasion is also remarkable. The sycophants around despots are generally distinguished for caution. Even in their revels they are seldom off their guard. Now it was at the utmost hazard that they gave this advice. They must succeed, or fall. Though pure love could not influence the breast of a licentious eastern monarch, yet it is evident that Ahasuerus admired the beauty of his queen. The favorite mistress of despots is known to prevail against the most subtle and most powerful ministers. We see how readily this very monarch gave up to Esther the man whom he had most singularly honored and raised above all the princes of the empire. If the counsellors of the king should fail in displacing Vashti from the affections of their master, they were evidently planning their own ruin. Had the king refused to

listen to their counsel, and the queen been restored again to power, their overthrow was certain. Why, then, did not the supple statesmen take the wisest course, and make their court to the queen by interceding for her pardon? After all the provocation of the king by the queen's disobedience, it was still possible that a man who admired her beauty, and had provoked her transgression, might not instantly put it out of his power to forgive her. She might have been disgraced in such a way as not to prevent her restoration, on repentance. Such a bold step in the ministers of a despot is certainly remarkable. But whatever might influence them, God had determined their counsel as the means of fulfilling his own.

That the king should subject her to a temporary degradation or disgrace, even though his own improper command was the occasion of her transgression, is very natural; but that, for the cold-hearted purpose of setting an example to the wives of the empire, he could consent to give up for ever one whom he so much admired, discovers more stoicism than is generally to be found in absolute monarchs. Their treatment of their wives is usually more influenced by passion than by a view to public good. In the heat of his fury it would have been less strange that he should have given orders for her death, than that he should divorce her for an example to the wives of his

subjects. Yet, to the frigid morality of his wise men does this eastern sensualist sacrifice his beautiful queen. By a harsh decree she is divorced for ever. But this great feast—this capricious command—this imprudent disobedience—this rash advice—this unfeeling consent—this sacrifice of affection to policy—this harsh decree, are all necessary in the plans of Providence. Vashti must be removed, that Esther may be exalted to her place.

Let us next contemplate, for a moment, the elevation of a poor fatherless Jewess to the rank of queen of the Persian empire, and admire the wonderful providence of God in her destination. Is there any man so blind as not to perceive that it was entirely providential that one of the small number of captive Jews should be found more beautiful than all the virgins of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces? Can any one question that God gave her that exquisite loveliness for the very occasion? Known unto God are all his ways from the beginning; and in the formation of Hadassah he had an eye to the plan which he intended to execute through her. Had not God provided a Jewess of beauty surpassing all the virgins of the Persian dominions, the previous events would have been useless. Esther was found the most lovely of women, that through her beauty she might deliver the people of God.

In this circumstance we have a key to the Divine procedure in adjusting the various events in providence to the fulfilling of his plans and declaration with respect to the kingdom of his Son. All the persons who are called to take a part in the advancement or defence of the cause of God are gifted by him with the necessary qualifications. Many of these qualifications are given in their birth or education, though they may not for a length of time be called to use them. Sometimes they may even for years employ them in opposition to God. Such was the case with Paul, and doubtless some points of the character of this eminent apostle were bestowed on him in his very constitution, with a view to the service of Christ. He had many things by immediate gift; but he had some things by mental temperament and education. Any one who reads the History of the Reformation with an eye to this characteristic in Divine Providence, will see it surprisingly illustrated in innumerable instances. The character and circumstances of Luther alone will afford a multitude of such providential provisions. By a single gift was Esther fitted to be the deliverer of Israel: by a multitude of talents and acquirements, in the most wonderful complexity, was Luther fitted for the work to which he was called by God. Indeed, the history of the Reformation bears a very striking resemblance to

this deliverance of the Jews. Without a single miracle, God wrought a deliverance as surprising as the preservation of Israel, and many of those employed to effect it were as ignorant of God as the king of Persia. He used the passions and the interests of worldly men in bringing about his purposes, as well as the love and zeal of his own people. The preservation of the cause and people of God at that period was as much the work of Divine Providence as the deliverance of the Jews from the destruction to which they were destined by the wicked Haman.

All the learning, ability, and acquirements—the riches, birth, rank, and influence, through which at any time the cause of God has been served, have been conferred by God, in his providential government, to fulfil the purposes of his grace. Not only does he gift his own people for this end, but many who belong not to any of the tribes of Israel have been made hewers of wood and drawers of water for the service of the temple. Many able defences of the Scriptures—many satisfactory vindications of their doctrines, and illustrations of their contents, have been afforded by Providence through the instrumentality of men as ignorant of the true grace of God as they who deny their authenticity. The very ravens are made to feed the people of God, rather than that they should want.

In God's conferring on Esther this exquisite beauty, that he might raise her to royal rank, and to influence over the throne itself, we may see that the same thing may, in one point of view, be the Divine appointment, and in another may be the sinful action of men. This is a doctrine clearly taught in the Scriptures. It is here exemplified in the government of Providence. It is a truth, however, that the wisdom of this world cannot fathom, and therefore cannot receive. That God should in any sense appoint, or intend to bring about, what he has in his word forbidden, is indeed one of the deep things of God. It is the abhorrence of the wise, while many even of those who have professed to have become fools that they may be wise, in effect deny it by their explanations. But this is a doctrine that the sagacity of men will never penetrate; it is a depth that human intellect will never be able to fathom? Who can by searching find out God? Can nothing be true of him and his ways but what is to be comprehended by such worms as men? Is it not enough to command our belief, that God has said it? Is he not virtually an atheist who requires more? A Christian who rests the reception of the Divine testimony on his ability to comprehend the thing testified, is more inconsistent than a deist. One who recommends any truth of Scripture on such grounds insults God. The voice of Providence

combines with that of Scripture in testifying to the truth of the doctrine to which I have referred. God evidently provided the beautiful Hadassah for the bed of Ahasuerus. But does the Holy One approve of this connexion? Are the seraglios of sensualists according to his word? Does the divine law sanction the divorce of Vashti for such an offence? What can be more abominable in the eyes of God than this manner of choosing a queen? What could be more hurtful to the interests of men, or more repugnant to their feelings? How unreasonable that a brutal sensualist should possess all the beauty of his vast empire? How many of the fairest females were thus lost to society, and consigned to perpetual misery in the palace of the sensual despot? Can anything be more palpably contrary to the end of marriage, not only as it is declared in the word of God, but even as it has been understood by heathens? Yet God performed his purpose through this great wickedness of men. He has no share in human guilt, while the transgressors of his law are made to fulfil his purposes. Such wisdom is too wonderful for us; it is high; we cannot reach it. But it is God's wisdom; let us receive it with submission.

We may here see also the way in which God regulates the events in his providence for fulfilling his plans, by adapting them to the instruments

which he intends to employ in their execution. It was beauty that he gave to Esther, because beauty only could be the means of her elevation. All other accomplishments would have utterly failed. Had God given Esther greater riches than any subject of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, she would not have been a single step nearer the throne. Had she been the daughter of the most powerful man in Persia, or a person of the highest birth, God, in his providence, could have made her a convert, or a friend to the religion of the Jews; but this would not have forwarded her progress to the throne. Had she possessed all the wisdom of Solomon, or all the accomplishments of her sex, with the exception of beauty, she might as well have been an idiot or a rustic. Personal beauty only could raise her, and personal beauty the God of providence gave her, that she might be raised. This affords a key to God's plans in his providence, by which he governs a world that is at enmity with him. In this way he makes them obey his will who know him not, who hate him, and, what is still more strange, even while they fulfil his will, transgress his laws. How unsearchable are the counsels of Jehovah! His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.

The providence of God appears conspicuous even in the ignorance of Mordecai and Hadassah. A

marriage with a heathen was forbidden to the Jews. Now, had Mordecai and his kinswoman known their duty, her exaltation could never have taken place. But it seems very surprising that a man like Mordecai should be ignorant of this law of his God, or that he should know it, and join in the breach of it. Commentators are very willing to excuse him in this business. Mr. Scott says—"It does not seem to have been left to the choice either of Mordecai or of Esther;" and Dr. Gill is willing to believe that the fair Jewess went by constraint. But, were this true, is it a justification of a breach of the law of God? Why did Mordecai so uselessly hazard his own life and expose his whole nation to destruction, by obstinately refusing to honor Haman, and yield so readily to this vile prostitution of Esther? If danger will warrant us to violate the law of God, we will never want a pretext. But there is no evidence that there was any reluctance in this business. There is no account of a search, nor of concealment on the part of Esther. So far from hiding Hadassah when the king's commandment was heard, it appears that Mordecai was uncommonly solicitous to promote her exaltation. Mr. Scott, indeed, attempts to plead his vindication in this, by alleging, that as he could not prevent her from becoming one of the concubines of Ahasuerus, he might thus endeavour to have her made queen.

But even this reasoning is not good. Had she been violated by the despot, she would not be justified in afterwards becoming his wife. Mordecai's zeal, then, to have her made queen is, in every point of view, unjustifiable. It was contrary to the law of God, yet it was in another point of view, God's own appointment. Instead of eagerly seeking a union with the king, Hadassah should have chosen the scaffold in preference. Her crime was much heightened by submitting to become his concubine before she became his wife. How many chances were against her that she might never have been called a second time into his presence?

Mr. Scott alleges, that "in her peculiar circumstances, the *ritual law of not giving their daughters to those of another nation* might not be thought obligatory." But can any circumstances justify the violation of a law of God? Very likely, indeed, Mordecai might have some way to excuse himself. The command, as contained in the law of Moses, could not be unknown to him. But, like many good men now, he might have some way of excusing himself from obedience. But whatever this might be, he must have deceived himself. Neither times nor circumstances can relieve from the obligation of obeying God's law. Could there be stronger circumstances to disannul the restriction as to marriage than those which existed in the

return from the Babylonish captivity? Wives had been married, and therefore ruined if the marriage is broken; children are born of these marriages, and, if the marriage will not stand, they must not only be bastardized, but even deprived of a father's roof, and education by him in the knowledge of the God of Israel. Yet all this was a matter of no consideration. Both wives and children must be disowned and driven away for ever. Let us read the Book of Ezra, and learn how sinful such marriages were accounted by all that feared God.

It is this wretched shift of times and circumstances that has subverted the whole order of Christ's house, and changed every ordinance of his kingdom. The laws of the kingdom are read in the Book of God; but, by some peculiarity in their situation, good men plead their excuse from observance, or, by forced explanations, conform the canons of Scripture to their own conduct. It requires but little ingenuity to devise a plausible pretext for not doing that to which we are averse, or for doing that we like.

Mordecai and Esther, then, were guilty in this affair. But this unaccountable ignorance of their duty prepared them to execute the part that God had allotted them in this wonderful display of his providence. Who can read this story without being convinced that this marriage was God's

plan for delivering the Jews from the approaching danger? Can anything be clearer than that it was contrary to the law of God? In some point of view, then, God appoints what the sin of men effects. He ordains actions which are entirely free, and in which men have all the guilt. This is as clear as the authority of Scripture can make it. Ask me to explain it, and I confess myself a child. I would as soon attempt to fathom space, or calculate the moments of eternity. I believe it, I confess it before the world, I urge the reception of it on Christians, because God has testified it in his word. Let God be true, and all men liars.

From this we see that the very ignorance of duty in the people of God may sometimes be providential, and serve his purposes. I have no doubt that there are still in Babylon many Mordecais and Esthers, whose ignorance in their unlawful situation is turned to the glory of God and the good of his people. But the good effected by them in such a situation does not lessen their sin in violating the law of God. It is the hand of the Almighty that brings good out of evil, and makes the ignorance of his friends, as well as the wrath of his enemies, to praise him. He will pardon them, but they will suffer loss, both in this world and the next. Even in this world, the most gainful violation of God's laws is a loss to a Christian, and obedience, at the cost of the most

expensive sacrifices, is a gain. What says the Lord Jesus to this question?—"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold more in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." The hundred-fold in this life cannot be of the things of this world, for then obedience would be a merely mercenary speculation. God does not bribe us to do our duty. It appears to me that it must be in the increase of light and enjoyment of God. The value of discovering God's mind in the Scriptures, and of beholding the glory of his character and ways, is incalculably great; and no one who has experienced it would exchange it for kingdoms. He is a blessed man who is the least in the kingdom of God; but there are many Christians who would not exchange with their brethren of the lowest attainments their views of divine things, as they have been taught by the Word and Spirit of their God, for all the glory of this world. The man who knows most of God is the first man on earth.

There is no reason, then, to envy the condition

of believers, who, from ignorance, can enjoy lucrative situations, even if there were no future loss. The peace of God, which will always be enjoyed in proportion to knowledge and obedience, is beyond all the treasures of the world. This view of things is highly useful, for sometimes Christians may not only be tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked, but even the condition of their brethren, whose ignorance allows them to possess more of the popularity, honors, and gains of the present world. Peter himself, when informed of the manner of his death, appears to have felt more from jealousy lest the beloved disciple might not be called to like suffering, than he did for the thing itself. "Lord," said he, "and what shall this man suffer?" It behoves us all to attend to the answer. "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee: follow thou me."

There is an obvious advantage in knowing and doing the will of God. Paul says, "If any man's work shall abide, which he hath built on the foundation laid by him, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." He who got the greater number of talents, and made the best use of them, was made ruler over the greater number of cities. And what

talent can be compared with the knowledge of the will of God?

Some people are willing to believe that whatever is lost by obedience to the will of God, will in some way be made up to them, even in this world, though it is their duty to obey without this consideration. But this view is false, fanatical, and hurtful. Though in every situation, we have a right to look to God, for this world as well as for the next, yet we know not to what sort of trials it may seem good to God to expose us. There is no safety in anything but in counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and to be ready for him to suffer the loss of all things.

Sometimes the servants of Christ excuse themselves from complete conformity to his institutions, and vindicate the observance of the commandments of men in the things of God, by alleging the field of usefulness that accommodation in these things lays open to them. If they can point to any good done by them, they suppose that it is God's approbation of their situation. But in this they deceive themselves. Their conduct, as a transgression of the law of God, remains sinful, though his sovereignty turns their ignorance to his glory and the good of his people. Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. It is a foul calumny on God

to suppose that it is necessary to disobey him, in order to do good. This takes it for granted that his laws defeat their own end. When in the wisdom of God, he makes the ignorance of his people to serve his purpose, this no more excuses their ignorance and their conduct that results from it, than the good effects of the death of Christ will justify the crime of Judas Iscariot. God will, no doubt, forgive the ignorance of his people, but he will never hold it innocent. He will never approve it. Through the instrumentality of his people who understand not the nature of his kingdom, God provides that multitudes hear the gospel, who are to those in a scriptural situation altogether inaccessible. Yet this does not warrant the situation. Some of the people of God are in mystical Babylon, and, no doubt, will in some way serve God's purposes in that vile situation, yet the voice of God does not cease to sound in their ears, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." A Christian who knows his duty would not break the least of the commandments of Jesus, to enable him to turn the revenues of all the kings of the earth to the service of the cause of Christ. I might be asked, if all men would embrace my views of the nature of a church of Christ and his ordinances, and act on them with rigor, what would be the consequence? Millions who now

constantly hear the gospel would be entirely shut up from it, and the hundreds of thousands of pounds that are raised annually for the spreading of the gospel, would fail. If none are to be embodied in the church except such as appear to be born again by the Spirit through the belief of the truth, how would the gospel be supported? How would it be spread over the world? And so asks the child, If the moon is not nailed to the sky, will it not fall? This is a preposterous fear. Leave God's province to himself; fill your own well. Follow Jesus, though it should leave the whole world to be involved in darkness. But there is no fear of such a result. Though God now makes use of the ignorance of his people to support and advance his cause; if they all knew their duty, he would give still more signal success. The silver and the gold are his. When it served him, Jesus said to a rich man, "Zaccheus, come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house." All the wealth of the world is at his absolute disposal, and the moment he needs it, he will call for it. Let not the servants of God do evil that good may come. Let them not disobey him, that they may put themselves in a condition to serve him. I would not set at nought the least of Christ's little ones. I will acknowledge all who know him, as far as I can know them, notwithstanding all the ignorance they may labor under. But I will not,

out of complaisance, cease to declare what I learn from the word of God ; I cannot cease to call on Christians to follow Jesus. Their ignorance is sin. The good which they do through ignorance is no justification of it. Esther saved the Jews, but by being in a situation to do so, Esther transgressed the law of her God.

The providence of God is seen in every step of the progress of Esther to her destined elevation. As in the case of Joseph, when sold into Egypt, God provided friends for her in all who had the means of seeing her. He filled every heart with good-will towards her, at first sight. The king's chamberlain was pleased with her from the first moment of her arrival, and accelerated her progress by every means in his power. "So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him ; and he speedily gave her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house ; and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women." When her turn came to approach the

king, "she required nothing but what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed; and Esther obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her." Surpassing as her beauty was, this universal favor cannot be ascribed to it. In courts, envy and intrigue often prevail over every claim. Had not God disposed the hearts of those who beheld her, some far inferior beauty might have been the general favorite.

Notwithstanding her incomparable beauty, it was possible that the king's affections might have been anticipated by some of those who had previous access, or, from caprice or peculiarity of taste, he might have preferred another. But the providence of God had ordered this also, and no one pleased the king before the approach of the lovely Hadassah; and she obtained an instant preference. "So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus, into his house-royal, in the tenth month (which is the month Tebeth), in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti."

The conspiracy of two of the king's chamberlains is another event in which we may see the hand of God, for effecting the elevation of Mordecai, preserving him from the wrath of Haman, and

investing him with authority for the defence of his people, as well as the destruction of their enemies. A plot for the assassination of the sovereign is indeed no unprecedented thing in the courts of absolute monarchs. It is granted, that the only impulse on the mind of the conspirators, exciting them to the murder of their master, was their resentment on account of whatever injury or provocation they had received. Their motives were not, in the remotest degree, to fulfil the counsel of God; nor are they sanctioned by him. They are therefore themselves solely responsible for their wicked intentions. But that this conspiracy was ordered of God, cannot surely be a matter of doubt with any who connect this fact with the others recorded in this history, and who believe the narrative to be the word of God. It is here as evidently brought in to contribute towards the general issue as any incident in a drama. Take it away, and the whole chain is broken. Let us then admire the wonderful ways of Providence, in bringing about events through the freedom and the sins of human action. Why did these officers receive provocation at this particular time? Why did they attend more to the gratification of their revenge than to their safety? Is a conspiracy to slay the sovereign the usual result of every great injury done by him to individuals? Why was not the conspiracy better conducted? why was it

made known and frustrated? above all, why was Mordecai the man by whom it was discovered? why was he the man to whom it was known? Take away this link of the chain, and all the other links are useless. Whatever, then, was the means of bringing it to the knowledge of Mordecai, it was God that made it known to him, as much as if he had revealed it in a supernatural manner. Indeed, as Dr. Gill observes, "the latter Targum says, it was showed unto him by the Holy Ghost;" for the wisdom of man cannot see how the providence of God can arrange human actions to fulfil his purpose without any miracle. How many chances were there, humanly speaking, that no conspiracy should have existed at this time, or that it should not have been found out; or, if discovered, that Mordecai should not have been the discoverer? Was not the event evidently intended to lay a foundation for the future safety, elevation, and power of Mordecai? How encouraging is this document! The Lord's people are frequently in danger. Their enemies lay snares for them, which no human wisdom can enable them to escape. How consoling is it for them to reflect on this wonderful narrative! Here is a fact that ought to encourage them in their most trying difficulties. *The Lord laid a plan, and prepared means for the deliverance of his people in the Persian empire, even before their enemies had prepared the plot for*

their destruction! When therefore we are encompassed on every side, let us look to the hand of the Lord to execute the plan which he may have prepared for our deliverance. When Hagar cried unto the Lord, he showed her a well, which is as wonderful in Providence, if the fountain had been there from the creation, as if it had been opened by miracle.

Having considered God's wise and gracious provision for the safety of his people during the approaching storm, we shall now attend to the events by which it was raised. We may discover the hand of God in this, no less than the former. The providence of God brings his people into danger, not because he is unable to ward off even the appearance of it, but that he may glorify himself in their deliverance, and exercise their graces. Were they never in danger, they would be deprived of some of the greatest opportunities of praising the wisdom, kindness, and watchfulness of his providential care; his enemies would want an occasion of manifesting their enmity to them and him; and their faith would be without its necessary trials. But though, in one point of view, God wills the persecution of his people, the sin of the persecutor is all his own. He is ignorant of God's purpose, and his enmity to them arises from his enmity to him. Though he fulfils the appointment of God, yet he wickedly gratifies his own evil dispositions.

It is a curious fact, but not a singular one, that God raised up Haman to bring his people into danger, as well as Esther to deliver them. In this, as in other things, the Divine wisdom is distinguished from the human in a striking manner. No man would nurture the wretch whom he should know to be the future enemy of himself and his offspring. But God exalted Haman in the court of the great king, above all the princes of the empire, for the very purpose of giving him an opportunity of manifesting his enmity against his people, and of attempting the destruction of the whole nation. He puts his enemies in the most favorable situation to oppose him, that he may show with what ease he can discomfit the utmost efforts of their malevolence ; nay, he makes the very wrath of man to praise him, and the plans of his enemies to destroy his cause are made to effect its establishment.

The motives of Ahasuerus in the promotion of Haman were, no doubt, such as usually influence absolute sovereigns in conferring their favors, and in choosing the objects of their particular bounty. In the caprice of affection, they set no bounds to their liberality, and the most unworthy men in the empire are often their favorites. It is not strange, then, that it should have been so on the present occasion. But the direction of Providence is clear even amidst apparent casualties.

It was God raised Haman, as well as he had for a like occasion raised Pharaoh. The individual, the character, the crisis of his exaltation, the height of his elevation, are linked together by Providence for a good purpose. In such a light is this combination of circumstances exhibited in the inspired text. It is brought forward as one of the grand incidents which contribute their influence to bring about the result. "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him." Why was Haman the favorite at this time? Why was he raised to such a pitch of glory?

The next event that presents itself to our consideration, as contributing to bring the Jews into danger at this time, is the refusal of Mordecai to honor Haman, according to the king's commandment. Notwithstanding all that the commentators have said to justify Mordecai, I cannot but think that this part of his conduct arose from ignorance of his duty, and that he might lawfully have done the thing which he refused to do. Were it certain that Haman was an Amalekite, the fact would not vindicate a Jew in refusing him honor in the court of Persia. The command to extirpate the Amalekites was given to Israel only as a nation, and as living in their own land. "Therefore it shall

be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it." Deut. xxv. 19. What had Mordecai to do with this command in his present situation? But if Haman was really an Amalekite, and if this was the ground on which Mordecai refused to honor him, whether it was valid or invalid, the providence of God is visible in the matter. Why was the favorite an Amalekite? Why was one of that nation, at such a time, preferred to all the subjects of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces? On this supposition, had he been a Persian, Mordecai would have honored him without scruple, and so no storm would have arisen against the Jews.

It is alleged in favor of Mordecai, that an idolatrous reverence might have been required. Dr. Gill makes wonderful stretches to justify or excuse his conduct. As divine honors were given to the kings of Persia, he thinks that they might also have been exacted for their favorites; but of this he gives no proof. *It might be*, will prove nothing; and nothing to justify such a supposition is in evidence from the passage. On the contrary, the thing which he is said to have refused, is what he might lawfully have given. The

king's command enjoined all his servants to "bow down and reverence Haman." What should prevent any man to comply with this injunction of supreme civil power? But Dr. Gill's ingenuity finds even in this an argument on his side. The fact that "*the king had so commanded concerning him*, shows," he thinks, "that it was more than civil honor and respect, for that in course would have been given him as the king's favorite." But this would not have been in all cases a matter of course, and that it was enjoined, there is the evidence of this record. The king requires nothing but *to bow and reverence.* Even had Haman pretended to be a god, of which there is not the slightest evidence, this would not excuse any one from bowing to him according to the king's commandment. Caius made himself a god, but should this have hindered his Christian subjects to bow down to him and reverence him? Even if there was a danger that it might be mistaken by some for religious worship, let the principle on which it is performed be declared, but let not what is lawfully due be withheld.

Dr. Gill argues, that it must be more than civil respect that was required, because *that* the Jews did not refuse to give in the most humble and prostrate manner. This is just like saying that no Christian could refuse to uncover to the king, because Christians in general do this without

scruple; yet William Penn would not uncover to King Charles. Besides, if Mordecai's conduct was influenced by a consideration of the nation of Haman, or anything in his individual character, this argument has no bearing. I cannot say why he refused: what I say is, that he might have lawfully yielded all that was required.

That nothing more than civil honor was required for Haman by the king's command, is clear from the 9th verse of the fifth chapter—"Then went Haman forth that day with a joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai." Here his offence was, that *he stood not up*, nor even *moved* himself to Haman. Can any sober mind interpret this of religious worship? was there any idolatry in rising out of respect to the second man in the Persian empire? Whatever ceremonial might have been in approaching great men in that country, on this occasion there is no ceremonial, for there was no approach. The great man is passing, and Mordecai will not stand up, nor even move to notice him. Dr. Gill himself admits that this was civil respect; but, then, Mordecai, it seems, refuses even this, lest it should be interpreted as religious worship. Was ever greater violence used in special pleading? So then not even the smallest respect ought to be given to

heathen rulers who claim divine honors. But this, it seems, was only part of his reason. Mordecai was influenced, he says, partly by knowing that Haman had planned the destruction of the Jews. And would this justify him in refusing to obey the king's commandment? Another thing that weighed with Mordecai, he alleges, was, that he confided in Esther's influence to save the Jews, and therefore treated Haman with marked contempt. But may rulers be disobeyed when this can be done with impunity? Ought the man to be treated with contempt who is commanded by an absolute monarch to be honored above all his subjects? Is this the way in which Christians are to recommend the doctrine of Christ to the world?

But where is the necessity of arbitrarily supposing that this reverence must have had something idolatrous in it, when nothing but what is lawful is required in the words of the command? Was Mordecai perfect in knowledge, and infallible in conduct, that such a violent stretch must be made to justify him?

It is argued by Mr. Scott, that Mordecai was accepted of God in what he did, and therefore that his conduct must have been justifiable. But God's acknowledging him, and interfering to deliver him, are no proof that he approved of this part of his conduct. If God would not deliver his people from

the consequences of their ignorance, they would soon be destroyed. Is there any passage in this history which, either by implication or expressly, commends Mordecai for not bowing to Haman? I admit that his motives may have been good. If he intended to honor God, his motives would be approved, though his conduct might be the effect of ignorance. We see from Rom. xiv. that God accepts his people even in their ignorance, when they are influenced by a regard to his authority. But this does not change error into truth, nor sin into duty. I think it is manifest that Mordecai acted on principle, for even when he saw the frightful consequences of his conduct, he persisted in it with the utmost steadiness. The text also seems to insinuate, that he considered his being a Jew as a reason for refusing honor to Haman. But whether this had an eye to the nation or character of Haman, or in what way he supposed his being a Jew could justify this conduct, is not said, and cannot be known.

It has also been very properly replied, that the homage required does not seem to differ from that paid to Joseph by his brethren and by the Egyptians, or from those forms of civil reverence which the greatest saints of whom the Old Testament gives an account, observed without scruple before their superiors. Ezra and Nehemiah, and even Mordecai himself, must have rendered the

same homage to the king of Persia. It is answered, that in these cases, with respect to the Persian monarch, the forms of approach may have been dispensed with, in the approach of the Jews. But this is gratuitous, and exceedingly unlikely. It is not in evidence, and cannot be accepted as proof. But what will utterly destroy this forced supposition is, that Esther, in her first approach to the king, must have complied with the ceremonial; and she could not have been excused by her nation, for it was not known that she was a Jewess. And in all this she followed the counsel of Mordecai. What is still more, even after the nation of Esther was known, she not only did without scruple what Mordecai refused to Haman, but she prostrated herself before the king. "And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his decree that he had devised against the Jews," chap. viii. 3. Here she submits to the humblest prostrations to the king. Mordecai refuses to stand up, or even to move, in honor of Haman; Esther prostrates herself at the feet of Ahasuerus. It is utterly vain by special pleading to hope to save Mordecai in this matter.

This point is of no great importance in itself, but the forced interpretations and violent suppositions that are used in order to justify Mordecai,

is a specimen, in the disciples of Christ themselves, of the effects of human wisdom, to conform the word of God to itself, instead of implicitly bowing to its dictates. Had the learned and good men who have recourse to this criticism, in order to justify a man of God, met such an instance of outraging the inspired text, in the writings of the opposers of the doctrines of grace, they would have justly exclaimed with wonder, indignation, and horror. But they can consecrate the same licentious principle to make the text speak agreeably to their own wisdom. I have often observed, that in vindicating their own errors, the disciples of Christ avail themselves of the most licentious of the principles of criticism, which are the usual resource of the wildest heretics. On the contrary, the man of God ought to accustom himself in all things to conform himself to the word of God, to make his own wisdom bow to the Scriptures, and to receive implicitly whatever they teach.

Here, then, we see that even the ignorance of God's people is employed to fulfil his purposes. Mordecai's ignorance was sinful; but had he been better instructed in his duty, he could not have been employed on this occasion. Many a piece of service God has, in every age, allotted to some of his people, for which they are fitted by their ignorance. That he should bestow gifts on his people, to enable them to fill the station allotted to

them, is not a matter of surprise to any; but that the very ignorance of his people should fit them for certain situations for which he has designed them, could hardly be anticipated.

From this fact we may also perceive, that our ignorance of duty may frequently bring danger and persecution upon ourselves and the whole body of Christians with which we are connected. Haman's resolution to destroy the whole Jewish nation was occasioned by Mordecai's refusal to honor him. It is true, indeed, commentators are willing to believe that Haman's including the whole Jewish nation with Mordecai was influenced by the conviction that they were all of the same sentiment on this subject. This, however, is not only not in evidence, but it is direct contrary to the reason assigned by the Holy Spirit in the narrative. "And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he *thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone;* for they had showed him the people of Mordecai; wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai."

Mordecai is then fully chargeable with all the natural effects of his ignorance, even although a merciful Providence prevented the execution of the threatened vengeance. When an ill-informed Christian manifests a refractory, unsubmitting

spirit towards his superiors, it brings odium and persecution on all connected with him. That God should give the government of the world to his enemies, and demand submission to the wicked, is not what the wisdom of this world could expect. If Christians will listen to the counsel of their own hearts, rather than to the dictates of the Divine word, they will think it very unreasonable that the children of the Great King, the heirs of God, should tamely yield to the evil men in power, and honor their persecutors. But such is the law of that kingdom which is not of this world. That spirit that refuses honor to worthless men in power is not the spirit of the gospel. That proud and insolent piety that refuses the customary tokens of respect even to majesty, was not practised by the patriarchs, nor was it inculcated by the apostles. If it finds shelter in the conduct of Mordecai, it ought to be known that it is sanctioned only by Mordecai's sin.

The next providential circumstance we shall review is Esther's concealing of her kindred. Had it been known to Haman that Esther was a Jewess, and the near kinswoman of Mordecai, he certainly would not have attempted any violent measures against either Mordecai or the Jews. Nothwithstanding his mortification on account of the insult, he would have found it prudent to smother his resentment, or to gratify it in a more indirect way.

He could not have expected to prevail, as long as Esther retained any share in the affections of the king. Mordecai's intention in enjoining Esther to conceal her descent, was, no doubt, lest her being a captive Jewess might prevent her advancement to the situation of queen. The odium of her religion, as well as the captivity of her nation, would appear to him to stand in the way of her elevation. God's intention by that concealment was to preclude a circumstance that would have prevented the danger of his people. He designed to bring them to the very brink of ruin, that he might manifest his power in their deliverance. It was ignorance and carnal policy in Mordecai; yet in another view, it was ordained by God for a wise purpose.

From this fact we may see, that worldly policy in religion naturally leads to disappointment and trouble. When by their wisdom, Christians seek preferment, or endeavor to escape the cross, by concealing any part of the truth, they are generally preparing a scourge for their own back. Esther, by the advice of Mordecai, concealed her religion, for the purpose of obtaining a situation that would enable her to protect the cause and people of God; but by that concealment the ruin of her whole nation would have been effected, had not a merciful God interposed to ward off the intended blow. Every means contrary to the word of God promise

affliction to the people of God. Believers who conceal the truth to obtain any worldly advantage, may congratulate their policy when they succeed; but let them look about, for danger and sorrow are pursuing them. They have made a pit in which they will sink, if a merciful God prevent not the natural tendency of their conduct. From the bold and independent spirit of Mordecai, we may reasonably infer, that his desire of the advancement of his kinswoman was more influenced by zeal for the good of his nation than by any views of private advancement. The advantage of her exaltation to the cause of the captive Jews, would blind him to its sin. How often do Christians, reasoning on the same principle, overlook the laws of God! Jesus Christ, by his apostles, separated his disciples from the world for observance of the ordinances of his kingdom; but human wisdom has violated this order, and sought protection and power to the cause of God, through a marriage with the world. In the writings of the apostles we everywhere meet with the distinction between Christ's people, who are called "Christians," "believers," "saints;" and the rest of mankind, who are called "the world," those who are without, &c. But by the marriage of Esther with Ahasuerus, there is now no world: there are none without; for every man in Christendom either belongs to what is called the church, or may belong to it if

he chooses. That this marriage has produced some good effects, I am not the person to deny. It may often have been a shield to the people of God. But with all the advantages that it has ever had, the bans are forbidden, for the marriage is contrary to the word of God. None ought to have a place in the church of Christ but such as appear to be his disciples. When the Lord shall stand upon the wall that was made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand, the high places of Israel shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, Amos vii. 7. The greatest possible good to the cause of God cannot justify the smallest deviation from his commands. Let the ark of God itself fall, rather than attempt to uphold it with a human hand.

Let us adore the mercy of our God, who steps forward in the time of our danger, to rescue us from the consequences of our own policy. He might justly have given up Mordecai and Esther, to reap the reward of their sin. But as their conduct was the effect of ignorance, he saves them from ruin, and promotes them to honor. Their devotedness to the cause of God is unquestionable. He forgets not the glory of his own name, and though his people are ignorant and sinful, he looks to the perfection of the righteousness of their Substitute, his own dearly beloved Son.

Not only was the great elevation of Haman pro-

vidential; the commandment of the king for all to reverence him in a marked manner, was also directed by the Divine counsel. The favor of the king would indeed naturally have procured respect for the object of it; but the royal command made the neglect a breach of the laws of the king; and exposed it to the notice of the other servants, who made it known to Haman. "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? is a question which shows that the offence was considered not a breach of courtesy merely, but the violation of the royal authority. Without this commandment, Mordecai might have escaped. That Haman was immediately informed of the people to whom Mordecai belonged, was also providential, for he had not previously known this. Had not this been discovered, the body of the Jewish nation would have escaped the danger to which Mordecai was exposed. But a wise Providence took care that this fact should not lie hid, that his name might be glorified in the salvation of his people, and in the destruction of their enemies. Why was Esther's descent unknown, though she was advanced to be consort to majesty, while Mordecai's was notified as soon as his offence? Yet the other servants themselves had not previously known this. It was on this very occasion that he himself discovered his kindred; "for he had told them that he was a Jew." Here we see, that as the caution of Mordecai in

advising Esther to conceal her nation was the means of bringing it into the utmost danger of total extinction, his voluntary discovery of his descent was now to have the same effect. The utmost exertions of human wisdom may often be employed to bring about what they are intended to prevent.

But what above all calls for our wonder is, that a monarch, who ought to consider himself the father of all his people, shall, for no purpose but the gratification of a wicked favorite, give up a whole nation to perdition. If no sentiments of duty or of pity had any weight with him, why did not his interest as a sovereign forbid his compliance with the cruel request? Yet, in defiance of every principle of humanity, justice, and policy—without even the pretence of any misconduct—he gave the lives of the whole Jewish nation, "both young and old, little children and women," a present to his unprincipled favorite. The unsubstantial reasons alleged are not weighed, but received implicitly, without examination. After all, there is nothing in the history to show that Ahasuerus was a cruel or tyrannical man. His conduct in this instance is an easy, unsuspecting compliance, in a matter that required the utmost deliberation and caution. Let us attend a moment to the argument employed by the crafty favorite to overreach his master, and destroy the people of God. "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is

a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those who have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

What was the head and front of the offence of this people? Their laws were different from those of all other nations. They would not observe the religious institutions that were ordained by man. The civil law of the countries of their captivity it was their duty to obey. Their God commanded them to "seek the peace of the city whither he had caused them to be carried away captive, and to pray unto the Lord for it," Jer. xxix. 7. But to neglect the ordinances of their God, or to observe the religious rites appointed by man, they had no license. Why were the Jews to be blamed for the singularity of their institutions, for their scrupulous separation from other nations, and for their firmness in refusing compliance with the rites of all other religions? If their laws were singular, were they not the laws of God? Why do kings and rulers pretend to interfere between God and his people? Why do wretched mortals assume an authority to set aside what God enjoins? Let

Christians in every country render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's, but to God the things that are God's. If rulers must usurp the throne of God, let them attempt to alter the rising of the sun, or regulate the changes of the moon; but let them not dare to meddle with the laws of the kingdom of Christ.

The allegations of Haman against the Jews are still substantially the ground of accusation against those who fully follow the churches planted by the apostles, and refuse compliance with all the institutions of man in the things of God. They are held up as a singular kind of people, who, by the peculiarity of their religious observances, and their uncompliant spirit with respect to every deviation from the ordinances of God, manifest disaffection to the government of the country. In their religious observances, they are accused as being "diverse from all people." Fear of this accusation, more, perhaps, than any other cause, keeps the people of God from discovering the ordinances of Christ, and induces them to accommodate, as far as possible, to some of the great sects in the countries where they live. Israel grew weary of the government of God, and desired a king, that they might be like other nations. How long will the children of God neglect the laws of his kingdom! when will they return to the order and ordinances of his house!

How grateful ought Christians to be who live in a land of liberty! What a blessing it is to have the exercise of their religion secured to them by the laws of the state! If any of them are so ill-informed as not to be impressed with the value of this privilege, let them think of the Jews in the time of Esther—let them think of the state of Christians in this country in ages past—and in some other countries at the present moment. What a wretched thing it is to live in a country whose rulers assume the authority of God, and dictate in the things of religion? What a revolting idea to live in a country where an incensed favorite may receive a present of the lives of a whole nation! How degraded is the state of man in a country where an insolent courtier offers the sovereign a price for the lives of a whole people!

Yet the Christian has nothing to fear in any country. If he is called to suffer, it will be for God's glory and his own unspeakable advantage. If God has no purpose to serve by the sufferings of his people, he can, even under the most despotic governments, procure them rest. Jesus rules in the midst of his enemies, and is master of the resolves of despots. He restrains their wrath, or makes it praise him. If he chooses, he can give his people power even with the most capricious tyrants. They are as safe in the provinces of the empire of Ahasuerus, as in the dominions of Great

Britain. The history of the book of Esther demonstrates that there is no danger from which the Lord cannot rescue his people, even through the medium of the ordinary course of events. Without a single miracle, he brings them from the very brink of ruin, and precipitates their enemies into the abyss. We see them, as a nation, formally given over to destruction by an irrevocable decree; yet they escape without the suffering of an individual. "And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given unto thee, and the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee." Even the power of the king himself could not revoke this grant. Letters were sent to all the provinces of the empire, to secure the entire extirpation of the hated race. The enmity of the nations to the Jews is stimulated by their avarice. They are permitted "to take the spoil of them for a prey." Can human wisdom descry any possible means of escape for the captives of Israel in the midst of their enemies? Yet God is their deliverer!

Haman now thought his victory secure. The royal decree is obtained, and messengers are sent out with it to all the king's lieutenants in the provinces, in the languages of all the nations subject to Persia. "And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed."

Little did that unthinking monarch reflect on the misery to which his rash indulgence of a favorite had consigned so many of his innocent subjects. Could absolute monarchs get a view of the mischief caused by the oppression of their wicked favorites, they would often shrink from it with horror. Many a bloody decree originates not so much in the cruelty of their nature, as in the seducing flatteries of their courtiers. They watch the pliant hour, and in the moment of good-humor, they obtain the fatal grant. From that moment they keep the matter at a distance from his ear, and divert his attention by the gratifications of intemperance and debauchery. How insensible is the mind of men in certain situations! "There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart, it does not feel for man." Despots and their sycophants sit down to their drunken banquets, after giving decrees that involve whole nations in misery!

As God can protect his people under the greatest despotism, so the utmost civil liberty is no safety to them without the immediate protection of his Almighty arm. I fear that Christians at present in this country have too great a confidence in political institutions, and in the enlightened views of the public on the rights of conscience. We hear more boasting of the march of mind than of the government of God. It is thought impossible, into whatever hands power may fall, that ru-

lers in this country should ever attempt to effect uniformity in religion, or apply force in the affairs of religion. Such an opinion is as unfounded in the philosophy of human nature, as it is destitute of the authority of history and of the word of God. There are not wanting some symptoms of the rise of Haman, and if he does not at length obtain a present of the lives of his enemies, it will be owing, not to the light of our politicians, but to the overruling providence of God, in opposition to that light. At all events, let Christians confide in the power and watchfulness of their God, not in the schemes of fanatical politicians. Even at the present moment, I am confident that there are many places in the empire where there is not entire liberty of conscience. There may be the liberty of the statute book, when there is danger from the mob; and where there is not perfect safety for the Christian in exercising, and in publishing, and spreading his religion, there is not practical liberty of conscience. To have liberty of conscience, we must not only be freed from all force constraining us to profess a religion which we do not assume; we must also be safe in the most active and public efforts to spread our own.

Let us now attend to the providence of God effecting the deliverance of his people from this awful danger, and precipitating their enemies into the pit which they had prepared for others.

. The disposal of the lots cast before Haman, to ascertain the most lucky day for striking the intended blow, attracts our attention as the first providential circumstance for the salvation of the Jews. Even before Haman had obtained the royal consent for destroying them, he had used divination to discover the most fortunate time for executing his purpose. Shall the oracle of Satan be compelled to speak for God? Shall the god of this world lose all his sagacity when he comes to fix the destruction of the people of the Lord? Why did he choose the last month in the whole year, when the execution of his plan would have been promoted by immediate despatch? "The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposal of it is of the Lord." He works his own will by the counsels of devils, as well as through the agency of the angels of his presence. "In the first month, that is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar." From the direction of this oracle, the day of execution was fixed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is, more than eleven months after the decree. Whether the laws of nature, or the agency of infernal spirits, guided this answer, it was evidently ordained by God for the salvation of his people. Had the day of execution been im-

mediate, there was nothing to prevent Haman's wicked purpose from taking effect. But his very superstition is made to co-operate in God's plan for the preservation of Israel. When the devil himself is consulted, he gives the most foolish advice to his friends, when God has any purpose to fulfil by it. He that was a murderer of the saints from the beginning is here made an instrument to effect their preservation.

We have here a key to the providence of God with respect to the heathen oracles. Though they uttered the responses of demons, they were made the means of fulfilling the purposes of God. Satan by them ruled the world, but God in them overruled Satan himself. While the devil was the God of this world, and held men captive at his pleasure, Jehovah ruled the earth as absolutely as he did the angels of heaven. While men in general were serving the prince of darkness, the Lord effected his own sovereign purposes through their agency. Human wisdom may exclaim, How is this! Let it fathom the depths of the Divine wisdom before it repeats the question. If God is God, the rebellion of devils and of men must be in some way for his glory.

By a like expedient, Jehovah provided that Jonah should be cast into the sea. He raised a tremendous storm against the ship in which the refractory prophet was sailing. But what providence is in a

storm? The philosopher sees in this nothing but what he calls nature, and the laws of nature. "But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea." Although storms, and earthquakes, and pestilence, and thunder, and war, and famine, may all be brought about by natural causes, they are all the work of the Almighty. But when the storm is raised, how is it to manifest Jonah? It is through the impression of the heathen mariners that it was sent as a judgment. Why were they struck with this impression now? Did they look on all storms in this light? or did they judge from the peculiarly tremendous nature of this tempest? In whatever manner the impression came, it was to fulfil the purpose of God. But even with this impression, how is the guilty person to be detected? How are these heathens to find out the will of the God of Israel? It is through the means of their own superstition. It is by casting lots; and though God always disposes the lot, there is no reason to believe that he will always in this way manifest a guilty person. Were this the case, rulers would have no difficulty in detecting guilt, and discriminating between the guilty and the innocent. But the heathen mariners acted on their own superstitious opinion, which was nothing better than the origin of dueling; and in this instance God spake through their oracle: "So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah." Here, then, we

see the way of Providence. The Ruler of the world effects his purposes by every agent, and makes use of the opinions and motives, of the resolutions and actions, of all men. Nay, he overrules their very crimes to fulfil his plans. In these sentiments of the heathen mariners, however erroneous they are in some respects, yet it is pleasing to see the strong conviction of an overruling Providence. This is strikingly obvious, both in their opinion of the cause of the storm and in their expedient of the lots. As Ælian has observed, "Atheism is the refinement of speculation, and not the dictate of human nature. No one of the barbarians," says he, "ever fell into atheism, or started a doubt as to the existence of the gods. They have no such discussions as, Are there gods? and if there are gods, do they take care of us? Neither Indian, nor Celt, nor Egyptian, ever conceived such a notion as Epicurus and the atheistic Grecian sages." Now, this observation of the heathen historian is of great importance. In whatever way the impression has been received, it is general, that Divine Providence rules in all the affairs of men. This view of nature is only stifled by some of the greatest fools in human shape, who style themselves philosophers.

But let us return to the history of Mordecai. How wonderful is the providence of God in restraining Haman from taking immediate vengeance, on

receiving a fresh insult, as he returned in triumph from Esther's banquet! "Then went Haman forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor bowed for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman refrained himself!" *Haman refrained himself!* There is something more wonderful in this than even in a miracle. In my view, Almighty power would not have been so illustriously displayed, had God interfered to save Mordecai, by causing the earth to open and swallow his adversary, as by ruling his impetuous passions without interfering with the freedom of his determinations. Haman has a royal irrevocable decree for the destruction of the whole Jewish nation; he is elated beyond measure by being the only person invited to the queen's banquet with the king; he is again insulted by the man whom he so much abhorred; his mind is full of wrath; yet he refrains from immediate violence! Where did he learn his self-command? Look at the mouths of the hungry lions with Daniel before them; look again at the enraged Haman, and Mordecai untouched in his presence. God, who stopped the mouths of lions, and preserved his children in the furnace, manifested here a more wonderful power in directing the free will of a bloody persecutor, armed with the authority of the Persian empire. It was Haman's own

action—"he restrained himself!" yet it was the working of the providence of God. Not so wonderful would it be to see a ship standing motionless in the midst of the tumult of the waves, or the raging billows rolling to the shore without touching the rocks, as to see Haman restraining himself on this occasion. Let the children of God read, and believe, and rejoice. When their enemies are maddened with rage, their God can make them restrain themselves, even without changing their heart. By his inscrutable providence, they willingly resolve to refrain from injury, or to delay vengeance, even while they feel no pity.

We may recognize the hand of Providence in overcoming the fears of Esther when solicited to approach the king in behalf of the Jews. By going uncalled into the inner court, she would subject herself to death by law. Judging from the manners of our own country, we may think that her risk was small. But in estimating her danger, we ought to take into account the caprice of despots in countries where polygamy prevails. This moment they devote to destruction the object on which they doated the moment before. Besides, Esther had reason to apprehend an alienation of affection, or at least a coldness, as she had not been called into his presence for thirty days previously. Here, indeed, is another providential circumstance that ought to excite our wonder. Whatever was

the reason why the king had so long neglected her, the thing was undoubtedly a part of the Divine plan, that Esther's danger might be increased, her faith put to the severer trial, and his own power more fully manifested in obtaining for her a gracious reception. Let the children of God look at this and take a lesson. When he calls them to arduous duties, instead of smoothing the way and removing the appearance of difficulty or danger, he often, by his providence, throws obstacles in their way. A wife, in following Christ, instead of delighting her husband, may give him the greatest offence. Children may make their very parents their enemies by their obedience to their heavenly Father. Instead of inducing his disciples to discover his laws and ordinances, by the prospects of greater acceptance with the world, he promises them nothing but ridicule and hatred. Instead of flattering every instance of obedience with additional honors and rewards from men, the discovery of the laws and institutions of Christ's kingdom may be followed by the loss of all things. God will not bribe his people to serve him. He will not secure their allegiance by hiding them from danger. They must give their life, if he calls for it, or give up the hope of the heavenly inheritance. They must count the cost, and be willing to incur it; they must take up the cross and follow him. They are not to fear him who has power to kill

the body, but rather him who can punish both soul and body in hell for ever. Jesus must be obeyed in the prospect of every danger. He that loves his life, shall lose life eternal. Yet, in general, it may be observed, that when Christians are made willing to face every danger for Christ's sake, the greatest real dangers that they may have dreaded are turned away from them. When God has tried them sufficiently, he removes the trial. Esther's apparent danger was heightened by her long neglect. Yet, after all, her God procured her acceptance with the king.

It is absurd in any at this time to underrate the trial of Esther. She must herself, doubtless, have been a better judge of the extent of her danger than we can now possibly be; and she estimated it so highly, that at first she altogether refused to comply with the request even of Mordecai, to whom she had in all other things paid the deference due to a father. "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live; but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." Her life, then, was actually forfeited by the act; and to spare her was the pardon of a criminal condemned to die.

Besides, she must, in this approach to the king, appear in a new character, as a captive, as a Jewess, as one of these already given up to death in the grant to Haman. In such circumstances, she might well be apprehensive that by her death he might make way for a successor. What trust is to be put in the affections of a capricious despot? What confidence is to be placed in the unfeeling man who could give up the beautiful Vashti? Might not some reasons of state operate to the destruction of Esther?

Her apprehensions of the magnitude of her danger appear evidently in the preparations with which she thought it necessary to approach him. All the Jews in Shushan fasted three days, night and day, before she ventured on the dangerous service. It is also evident, in the words in which she expressed her determination, that having counted the cost, she was prepared to give her life as a sacrifice for her friends. "If I perish, I perish." She consented not to undertake this mission till she overcame the fear of death.

What a blessing is marriage according to the institution of God! Was she truly a wife who could not trust her life with her husband? Better to be the wife of a Christian peasant, than the queen of a Persian despot. In the midst of all her regal honors, what happiness could Esther enjoy in her situation? Yet with what preposterous artifice

did she and her guardian court the dangerous height! The prospect of wretchedness will not deter the fallen human mind from seeking the glories of this world, even at the expense of the soul. Man is a strange compound of meanness and of pride.

Let us take a glance at the arguments by which Mordecai prevailed on the queen to undertake to intercede for the Jews. They are such as were calculated to produce the desired effect, and were, no doubt, suggested by a gracious Providence. The faith manifested by Mordecai in the Divine protection, approaches to that of Abraham himself. If, then, faith is the gift of God, there is no doubt that Providence directed the resolution of Esther. "Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Notwithstanding the greatness of the danger, Mordecai appears confident that his God would raise up deliverance from some quarter. He rightly interprets the intention of Providence in raising her to royalty for this very occasion. Here we have a beautiful example of the view of

Providence entertained at that time by the people of God. Mordecai knew well the events that led to the exaltation of Esther. He knew that she was raised in the ordinary course of human affairs. He knew that her exaltation was owing to the divorce of Vashti, and to her own surpassing beauty. An atheist would have no difficulty in accounting for it. Yet Mordecai believed also that God raised her, and justly concluded from the present danger, that his purpose in raising her was for the very purpose of interceding for the Jews. At all events, he concluded, that as she had it in her power to make an effort for their preservation with probable hopes of success, should she refuse to make trial of her influence, she might expect that God would signally punish her, and save his people in some other way.

Let all Christians learn from this, not to be backward in using their influence to protect the people of God, and serve the interests of his kingdom. If they hide their face, God will provide other instruments, and they shall not be without chastisement. If from apprehensions of danger they decline any service that the providence of God lays before them, the very thing that is dreaded may come upon them, and others may be honored to do the work in safety. "Thou therefore," says God to Jeremiah, "gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not

dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For behold I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land; against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." Jer. i. 7—19.

By the gospel the elect of God are to be saved from a greater destruction than that which threatened the Jews in the time of Esther. The gospel is to be spread over the world by the means of the disciples of Christ. Let them therefore brave danger, and shame, and loss, in publishing the glad tidings of salvation. Why have eighteen centuries passed since the giving of the command to preach the gospel to all nations, while many have not yet heard of the name of Jesus? The Lord's time indeed may not be come, but this does not excuse the indolence of his servants. The commandment is come, which is the only thing with which we are concerned. The Lord, will, no doubt, raise up instruments to effect his purpose in the proper time, but this will not make up the loss, or excuse the neglect of his slumbering servants.

By the institutions of Christ, his children are to be nourished and advanced in the knowledge of him. But the nature of his kingdom is yet little

understood; and every one of his ordinances having been changed in Babylon, still remained incrusted with superstition and human inventions. The children of God, then, are deprived of much of that wholesome nourishment which the pure ordinances of God are calculated to yield. Let allegiance to Jesus and the love of his people influence his disciples, who know his will, to zeal in making it known to others. Let no mistaken complaisance, with respect to the corruptions of divine institutions, prevent them from denouncing everything contrary to the word of God. Let not the emolument of office, the reproach of the world, or deference to the prejudice of God's people, induce them to practise what is not taught in Scripture, or to decline adopting everything enjoined by the authority of Christ. Has he not himself said—"And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say? Ye are my disciples if ye do whatever I command you."

Let not Christians, who know the law and ordinances of Jesus, fear to exert themselves in their defence. The corruptions of the ordinances of Christ are sanctioned by so many prejudices, and strengthened by so many interests, that Christians in general are irritated when they are called to inquire. The wise virgins have laid themselves down to slumber, and they are peevish with those who attempt to awake them. If they do arise for a

moment, it is usually to plead for a little more sleep, and to remonstrate against the violence and cruelty of the untimely intruders. He who will revive all the ordinances of Christ, and denounce everything human in religion, must be prepared for a kind of martyrdom even from Christians. This is much more painful than the enmity of the world; but even this he is not to fear. If believers, from the apprehension of becoming unpopular even with the churches of Christ, hide their knowledge, or decline to employ their talents according to their opportunities, let them learn from the lesson of Mordecai to Esther, that God can do his work without them; and that in some way they may expect the Divine displeasure. There cannot be a doubt that a Christian consults his good, upon the whole, by boldly and unreservedly doing the will of God. The more he shows himself dead to censure and to praise, the more he disregards gain and loss, when they stand in the way of duty—the more he will have reason to rejoice in the end. Let his ambition always be fired with the hope of ruling over ten cities. Esther, to save the people of God, flung herself at the feet of the despot, at the hazard of her life; but, instead of being put to death, Esther met with a most gracious reception. A day will come at last, when obedience to the most disagreeable of Christ's commandments will appear great gain.

We may also perceive here the good effect of wholesome admonition on a stumbling servant of God. The fear of man had prevailed over the love of her brethren, in the mind of Esther. But faithful admonition kept her from falling. How forcible are right words! From the suggestion of Mordecai, it appears, that though the royal decree consigned the whole Jewish race to death, yet that she counted on safety in the palace, as the wife of the king. But Mordecai undeceives her on this, and took away her flattering hopes. By declining to do duty, she put herself from under the Divine protection, and engaged the displeasure of Providence to seek her out for destruction. Nothwithstanding all her confidence in her situation, he denounces death to her and her father's house, if she declined the dangerous service. It is always under some false confidence that the children of God decline to obey him. To expose them, is, by the Divine blessing, the means of recovering the stumbling individual. Let not the servants of Jesus perceive one another going astray, or halting on the Christian race, without endeavoring to recover them. By the words of Mordecai, through the Divine blessing, Esther was brought from a state of abject timidity, to the confidence and boldness of a martyr. "If I perish, I perish!" Such ought to be the resolution of all God's servants. They should count the cost, and be willing to part

with property, fame, popularity, friends, relatives, life, for the sake of the Lord Jesus. "If any man come to me," says Christ, "and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Luke xiv. 26, 27. An apostle says, "As Christ laid down his life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren."

An incidental remark or an allusive application of the words in which Esther expressed her devotedness, may not be useless. People in a certain state of mind are represented as saying—"If I perish, I will perish at the feet of Jesus!" Surely there can be no similarity between the situation of a person approaching a despot, contrary to law, at the hazard of life, and that of one approaching the merciful Redeemer, by the command of God, with the assurance of pardon. There is no possibility of perishing at the feet of Jesus. Men perish through unbelief, in refusing to come to him. "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life." Whosoever comes to Jesus shall not be cast out.

From the conduct of Mordecai on this occasion, we may see that confidence in God does not preclude the use of means. Mordecai had immediate recourse to the influence of Esther, though, it is evident, he ultimately relied on the power and provi-

dence of God. It is obvious, from his observations, that he expected preservation from God through the use of means, even had Esther declined the intercession. "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise from another place." Let us learn from this, that as God has promised to protect us and provide for us, it is through the means of his appointment, vigilance, prudence, and industry, that we are to look for these blessings.

We shall now view the providence of God in the reception of Esther. Life and death are on the countenance of the despot, and according to the will of God he frowns or smiles. Had God designed her death, she would have found the king in another temper. But is not the king's heart in the hand of the Lord? Does he not turn it as he pleases? Esther is received most graciously, and accosted in the most affectionate manner. The coldness that had overlooked her for thirty days, gives place to the utmost warmth of affection, and, instead of the denunciation of death that she at first feared, she now hears the expressions of the most extravagant bounty. "Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house; and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. And it was so,

when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, *that she obtained favor in his sight;* and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom." "*And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight.*" This favor was the spontaneous affection of the king's own heart; but in another point of view, it was God who gave her that favor. Who is so blind as not to see the hand of God in this? who is so stupid as not to ascribe the glory to the Almighty in this matter? who does not here recognise Joseph's God? "But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, *and gave him favor* in the sight of the keeper of the prison." Who does not see the Lord that always interfered for Israel, and will always interfere for the deliverance of the true Israel of God? Who gave favor to the Israelites in the sight of the Egyptians on their leaving of Egypt? "And I will give the people favor," says God, "in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall come to pass, that when ye go ye shall not go empty."

Christian, see here the security of God's people in doing duty; see the encouragement to confi-

dence in his protection. From this learn the importance of humbling thyself before thy God in the hour of trial. See the duty of fasting and prayer in the time of trouble and of danger; see the resource of God's people in the time of their calamity. If we need the protection of men, let us first ask it from God. If we prevail with him, the power of the most mighty and of the most wicked must minister to our relief. Esther and her friends first cried unto the Lord, and humbled themselves before him, and then she went to the king. "Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink, three days, night or day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." How often do Christians look first to the means of deliverance! how often do they try every resource, before they go to God with a simple and confident reliance on him! how is their unbelief rebuked here! What encouragement does this hold out to confidence in God in the utmost danger! Only let us believe, and all things are possible.

Esther's delay in preferring her request is another providential circumstance. It is strange that she did not hastily take the advantage of the good-humor of the monarch, before she gave him

time for reflection and bad counsel. She might not find him again so complaisant. Her impatience also to be delivered from a state of suspense must have favored an immediate application. Yet without any assigned reason, she declined an explanation, not only at that time, but also at the first banquet. Whatever may have been Esther's design, the design of Providence is obvious. Had she at that time declared her request, Haman would not have had an opportunity of performing his part in the drama. This man of glory and of guilt must be allowed another scene on the stage of time, to exhibit his character in all its bearings, and to show the disappointment and misery of the enemies of God. His vanity is not yet at the highest pitch; he must be brought to the pinnacle of vain-glory. When he arrives on the summit of earthly magnificence next to majesty itself, he must grasp at the shadow of royal splendor. But in the grasp he must begin to totter to his fall. The crown he had devised to wear for a day, he must fix on the head of his greatest enemy. He must be made to minister to the man of God, whom he thought to destroy. Then shall he fall, never more to rise at all: he must prepare a gallows for Mordecai, but he must himself be hanged thereon.

Thus it shall be with the proud and prosperous wicked. Though they may not, like Haman, meet a retribution in this world, their honor will be suc-

ceeded with everlasting shame and misery. From the pinnacle of earthly glory they shall be hurled into the depths of hell. This prosperity is not to be envied by the poorest Christian. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green grass." Psal. xxxvii. 1, 2.

How vain is earthly glory! How irrational are the struggles of statesmen and courtiers for the giddy height of power! This moment their counsels may direct the destinies of nations; the next they may be hurled into the abyss of eternal misery. This day they may sit at the helm of empire; to-morrow they may appear before the dread tribunal of God. Now they are at the head of nobles and princes, and attract the notice of admiring millions; in an instant their souls may be required of them, and they may be covered with shame and everlasting contempt. Look at Haman. Was ever statesman or courtier more highly honored and advanced? He is drunk with worldly glory, but his soul is still thirsty. To what purpose is he mounting yon dangerous height? It is that he may tumble into the abyss below. While his happiness appears to the beholder to be complete, his own bad passions make him miserable. Infamy and ruin hover over him while he ascends, and he falls a monument of the vanity of earthly glory.

What a sudden and dreadful reverse! what a lesson to all the children of pride! what an example to statesmen and courtiers!

We may here see also, that even in this world the most successful ambition is always disappointed in the hope of happiness from the enjoyment of its object. The scholar, the man of science, the senator, the warrior, having gained the utmost eminence to which their throbbing hearts aspired, are not only unsatisfied with glory, but are perhaps more miserable than the lowest of the class to which they belong. There is still something that makes disappointment prey on their souls. In all his glory Haman confessed himself miserable, on account of the disrespect of an insolent Jew. "And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said, moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow am I invited with her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting in the king's gate."

All men are in the pursuit of happiness, and all, by nature, seek it in the things of this world; but in them it never can be found. Even the ac-

quisition of the things in which they suppose happiness to consist will disappoint them in the enjoyment. Man, at enmity with God, cannot be happy. The curse denounced against sin has entwined itself with all human enjoyments. It is seen not only in the thorns and briars, but also in the most voluptuous enjoyments of that royal luxury that crops the sweetest buds of a terrestrial paradise. It lodges not only in the cottages of the poor, but seats itself on the thrones of princes. Solomon has found that all earthly enjoyments are but vanity of vanities. Sinner, return to God through Jesus Christ. There is no real happiness either in this world or the next, but in the favor of Him from whom you fly. Ye children of pride, see in Haman the disappointment of your hopes! How unsatisfactory are your present enjoyments! how soon must you exchange your earthly splendor for the abodes of endless and unmixed misery! The basest of your menials, if he knows the Saviour of sinners, is a happier man than you. Seek happiness, then, where it is to be found—in the knowledge of God. "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Until you are delivered from your sins, the curse of God rests on you, and Divine wrath must pursue you both in this world and the next. Lay them on the head of the Lamb of God, and be free from guilt, pollution, and misery. "The blood of Jesus Christ

cleanses from all sin." Mordecai, with the threatening of death against himself and his whole nation before his eyes, was evidently a happier man, from confidence in the Divine protection, than Haman in the midst of the unbounded profusion of royal power. The children of God are, indeed, frequently sorrowful, but, paradoxical as the assertion may appear, if they enjoy their privileges *they are always rejoicing*. "Though now, for a season, if need be, they are in heaviness, through manifold trials, yet even now they rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory." They endure as seeing him who is invisible. Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the honor of Egypt: for he had respect to the recompense of reward. Even in the midst of all the afflictions to which he may be called for Christ's sake, the Christian has peace and joy. He is given strength for his day—faith in proportion to his trials. "Beloved," says the apostle Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name

of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

In this history of providential interposition, there is nothing more wonderful than the process that led to the exaltation of Mordecai. We already noticed the circumstance that put him in the way of royal notice. He had discovered a conspiracy against the life of the king. But why was he not rewarded immediately on the discovery? why was he so long neglected or forgotten by the king? The smallest services to majesty usually meet an immediate and a magnificent retribution. Why was the greatest service that could be rendered to man overlooked till it was entirely forgotten? Is the saving of the life of a sovereign of so little estimation? Are absolute monarchs wont to disregard the saviours of their lives? Shall such profusion of royal bounty be showered on the head of Haman, while Mordecai remains unrewarded? What can account for this strange conduct? One thing can account for it, and nothing but this can be alleged as a sufficient cause. The thing was overruled by Providence, for the fulfilment of the Divine purposes. God not only works his will through the actions of all men, but their very abstaining from action is employed by him for the same purpose. Had Mordecai been suitably rewarded at the time of his service, there would have been no opportunity for

the wickedness of Haman, and the danger of Mordecai, to be so wonderfully manifested. Had Mordecai been already advanced, Haman would not have sought his ruin. But by the delay, Haman is insulted; Mordecai is brought to the brink of ruin, from the wrath of the haughty favorite. Who is so blind as not to see the hand of God in this?

But if the reward of Mordecai at the time of his service would have been unsuitable to God's design in manifesting the wickedness of Haman, and his own power in the defence of his people, to have delayed it for a single day longer would have been ruin to the unbending Jew. His immediate death is planned by his enemies, and the next day would have seen him hanged on a gallows fifty cubits high. Haman was to ask the life of his enemy from the king, and to ask it was to obtain it. "Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king, that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made." Mordecai, what miracle shall deliver thee now? Shall God speak from heaven, or destroy thine enemies with his thunder? shall the earth open, and swallow them up that seek thy life? shall the angels of the Lord carry thee away,

and hide thee from thy pursuers? No! thy God will save thee by his providence, in a way suitable to the rest of his conduct manifested in this book. Death hovers over thy head, but he shall not strike thee; the wings of Providence shall overshadow thee, and turn aside the dart; thou shalt have both life and glory without a miracle. But if thou wast neglected at the time of so eminent service, what probability is there that thou shalt now be thought of? What friend of thine shall thy God send to the king, to remind him that he owes thee his life? who shall put him in mind of his obligation at this critical moment? Another day, and thou art a dead man! But thy God is not asleep, nor unmindful of thee in the time of danger. What is it that he cannot make the minister of his mercy to his servants? A remarkable interposition of his Providence shall bring thee into notice this very night. Though thou hast no friend to speak for thee, thy God shall cause the thoughts of the king to roam in the paths where he shall find thy claims displayed. Even in the unseasonable hour of night, the memorial of thy good deed shall come before him. The king lies down, but he cannot sleep; nor shall he sleep till he hears of Mordecai. "On that night could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told

of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the king said, What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him." Astonishing! "*On that night!*" O, gentle sleep, why didst thou forsake the king's couch on that critical night? There is indeed nothing strange to find thee leaving the bed of state, and fluttering with thy downy wings over the sooty cribs in the cottages of hardy industry. But why did thy caprice choose to leave the couch of Majesty in the critical moment? Didst thou not act as the minister of Heaven? Sleep, it was God drove thee on that night from the bed of Ahasuerus.

Let us here learn to trace the hand of God in the most trivial events. There is nothing fortuitous—nothing without God. Who would think of ascribing to God so seemingly unimportant a matter? Yet this link is essential in the chain of the wonderful providences by which the Ruler of the world executed his plan on this memorable occasion. Take this away, and the whole chain is useless. Another night would have seen Mordecai on the gallows, or in the grave. This fact teaches us, that there is nothing really casual as to God, even in a restless night of a human crea-

ture. How wonderful is the providence of Jehovah! how minute, how amazingly diversified, are its operations! The eye of the Lord beholdeth, and his wisdom directeth, all the events with respect to all the creatures in the universe. This would be too much trouble, and too mean an employment, for the God of the philosophers. But the God of the Scripture not only created all things at first, and established laws by which he governs them, but he continually worketh in his Providence. It is in him we live, and move, and have our being. It is by his immediate power that creation is sustained in existence, that every function of animal life is performed, and that every motion in the universe is effected. The blindness and enmity of the mind of man wish to put him at a distance, and to consider him no farther the governor of the world, than as the Author of the general laws of nature, according to which all events take place. But the Bible brings God before us in all things that occur. Of the innumerable insects that inhabit a blade of grass, there is not one whose vital functions are not carried on by the power of God. To him the lion roars for his prey, and he feedeth the ravens. He ever works without weariness. Epicurus removed his gods to a distance from the earth, that they might feast without disturbance from the tumults of men. He gave them a luxurious ease, far above

the clouds, and did not interrupt their festivities with the government of the world. And infidel philosophy, in modern times, does nearly the same, under the name of Christianity, by ascribing to God only what it calls a general providence. This is not the God of the Bible. The Christian may recognize his God as shining in the sun, breathing in the air, and living in all life. His immediate power is as necessary to sustain all things in existence, and to effect every change in their state, as it was to create them at first. His Providence is as necessary for the care of a microscopic insect, as for regulating the motions of a solar system.

Why then, O monarch of the east, did thy sleep forsake thee on that memorable night? When it fled, why didst thou not pursue it, and with thy instruments of music force it back to thy royal chamber? Call thy minstrels, and woo it with softest sounds of sweetest melody; lure it to thy couch with the voice of song. Come forth, ye harmonious choirs; raise your most enchanting airs, and lull your monarch in repose. Tell me, ye wise men of the world, why nothing could amuse the king at this time but the chronicles of his kingdom? Is this the usual requiem of an eastern monarch? Is a dry register of facts a likely expedient to hush the restless thoughts, and induce the gentler influences of sleep? Tell me, Ahasue-

rus, why that thought passed across thy mind at this time? Where shall I find its origin? Out of a million of millions of thoughts, this appears the least likely to strike thee at such a time. Thou art silent, O monarch! on this thou knowest no more than the bed on which thou dost lie. It came, but whence it came thou knowest as little as thou dost of the birth-place of the wind. And why didst thou yield to it when it came? What made thy free will prefer to indulge this thought? Was not the thought thine own? Was not compliance with its suggestions thine own action? Of this it is impossible for thee to doubt. How then can this thy thought be ascribed to God? In what mysterious sense can this action be the appointment of God? All is light, yet all is mystery. The facts are as certain and as obvious as the mind of man can wish; yet to adjust their boundaries is as impossible as to draw a line between the colors of the rainbow. The most obvious truths may be incomprehensible to man. This thought, and the action which was its result, are the king's; yet they are the instruments through which the Almighty Ruler of the world performs his purpose. Take these away, and you destroy the whole chain of Providence exhibited in the Book of Esther. But even when the book of the chronicles comes, are there not a thousand chances that the suitable part may not turn up? What directed the reader

to the proper place? In so extensive a subject as the annals of the Persian empire, what probability is there that the reader will happen on the few lines that record the service of Mordecai? He might have read till morning without touching this subject. What finger guided him to this story? Is it not more likely that the curiosity of the king would prompt him to hear some of the transactions of former reigns? This was the hour for the deliverance and exaltation of Mordecai, and it was the finger of God that pointed to the record of his service. Every step we advance in this wonderful history, we see a display of an overruling Providence. The Book of Esther is a book of wonders without a miracle.

The king hears the record of the conspiracy, and inquires about the reward of his services. He takes it for granted that he must have received a suitable recompense in honor and dignity; but finds that he is yet unrewarded. Strange! very strange! inexplicably strange! But God's design is clear. The Divine plan required that Mordecai's exaltation should be delayed till now. But it shall be delayed no longer. God's providence requires that this very moment Mordecai shall be raised; for Haman is at the door to demand his life. Keep Mordecai's services another hour unknown to the king and the servant of God is given into the hand of his enemy. How injudiciously

are royal favors often conferred! The man who deserved of the king more than any subject in his empire is neglected, while that worthless minion, Haman, rose almost to royal honors!

In the preservation of the life of the king, we may learn the duty of the servants of God to their civil rulers. Mordecai was in the land of the captivity of his people, yet, instead of forwarding a scheme for the murder of the sovereign, he saved him by a discovery of his danger. Christians ought to stand at the utmost distance from every scheme that tends to overturn or embarrass civil government. Their duty and their safety in every country demand submission to the ruling powers.

There is something worthy of admiration in the conduct of Mordecai during the time of his being neglected after his important service. We find no unbecoming intrusion on the notice of majesty, no cringing at the knees of Haman and the minions of a court, to forward his claims to preferment. Yet, when honors came, they are received without any affectation of stoical indifference; he appears in the splendor of royalty, and becomes greater and greater in the Persian empire. Unlike an Aristides or a Diogenes, he spurns not the favor of the king, nor returns a rude reply to the kindness of majesty. A Christian ought never to show himself lower than an heir of heaven; but to

affect a disregard to all worldly comfort, is the affectation of philosophic pride.

While in Mordecai we find something to blame, we may find in him much more to praise. God accepted him as his servant, though he was ignorant of some points of duty. In him we find the strongest faith in the Divine protection, and the most heroic devotedness to the cause of God and his people. Should not this be a lesson to us all? and while we faithfully bear our testimony against errors of every kind, let us be willing to acknowledge the servants of God in all the various denominations where they are to be found. We have all our own errors; and though this ought not to induce us to look on error as innocent, it ought to keep us from despising the weakest of the people of God. Is it not a most surprising thing, that any Christian can find a difficulty in recognising those whom God has recognised and sealed with his Holy Spirit?

At the critical moment of the king's inquiries about Mordecai, Haman had come into the outward court, to solicit for his immediate execution. Mark the Lord of providence in every step. Had not the king been kept from sleep—had not the book of records been called for his amusement—had not the account of the conspiracy turned up to the reader—Mordecai would now have been given into the hand of his enemy.

Mark the providence of God, also, in having Haman at hand, that by his mouth the honors of Mordecai might be awarded, and that by his instrumentality they might be conferred. Why did the king think of referring the reward of Mordecai to another? Why did he not himself determine the dignities to be conferred on his preserver? Or, if he refers to another, why does he not immediately leave the matter to those now about him? why does he ask, Who is in the court? why was Haman there at this moment? why was he the only one that waited so early on the king? why did Ahasuerus put the question in such a manner as to conceal the object of the royal favor? why does the king, instead of plainly naming Mordecai, use the periphrasis, "The man whom the king delights to honor?" why did this form of the question allow Haman to suppose that he was himself the happy man for whom the honors were intended? At this time the king knew nothing of the designs of Haman, and had no design to insnare him. Every circumstance here is wonderfully providential. From this we see that God can make the greatest enemies of his people the means of advancing their interests. Whom then ought the Christian to fear, but God?

Behold the retributive justice of God in the death of Haman! One of the chamberlains, who probably had seen it when he went to call him to the feast, mentioned the gallows that Haman had

prepared in his house to hang Mordecai. "The king said, Hang him thereon."

But we are not yet done with the wonders of Providence in this affair. Even with all the good intentions of the king, how can the Jews be preserved? The first decree could not be revoked; how then could a handful of Jews, scattered over all the provinces of the empire, stand up against their enemies in all nations? Although they had the royal license to defend themselves and destroy their adversaries, how could one small nation, so widely dispersed, escape destruction, when impunity invited the assault, and instigated malice? Their escape is secured by the awe inspired into the nations by the elevation of Mordecai. The God who so often filled the hearts of the most numerous armies with the dread of his people, few in number, now filled the nations of the Persian empire with the fear of them. "The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them: *for the fear of them fell upon all people.* And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the *fear of Mordecai fell upon* them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man

Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them." Fear not the malice of your enemies, ye children of the most High. Your God can deliver you out of their hands. Lift up your heads, Christians, for your redemption draweth nigh. Ye shall yet "have light, and gladness, and joy, and honor."

But in the book of Esther we are not only to attend to the wonderful interpositions of Providence manifested in the facts of the history. From the manner of revelation, in innumerable other instances, we are warranted to consider this history as prophetical and typical. In the deliverance of the Jews on this occasion, we may see God's method of preserving his church in the time of the fourth beast; and the final triumph of the saints of the Most High. When the Reformation opened the gates of Babylon, many Christians have remained there, or in some of its provinces. They are thus exposed to loss and danger; but they shall not be destroyed. Their enemies plot their ruin, but the mischief will ultimately fall on their own heads. In Haman we see a striking type of the man of sin: he seeks to destroy the whole Israel of God; but his effort will only bring on his own ruin. All must honor this wicked Haman. He indeed seeks divine honors, and there is a

temptation here to stretch the type to the antitype, and find Haman guilty of claiming divine worship. But this is not in evidence, and there is no necessity that there should in all things be a perfect correspondence between the type and the antitype. This likeness is seen sufficiently in the honors that his imagination suggested for the man whom the king delights to honor, when he supposed that he was himself the person. It is astonishing that he presumed to award royal honors to any subject of the empire. Was not this likely to awaken the jealousy of a despot? Yet such was the arrogance of this man of sin, that Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head; and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor." Can there be a more correct figure of the blasphemous pretensions of the man of sin, who has usurped the honors of God? These honors, however, were without scruple awarded to Mordecai by the king. "Then said

the king to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew that sitteth at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." And if Mordecai is a type of the Son of God, how justly were these honors awarded! The Father delights to have him honored even as himself.

In the unchangeable laws of the Medes and Persians, we may see one of the features of the kingdom of the man of sin, whose infallible decree cannot be altered. Yet notwithstanding the irreversible decree that determines the destruction of all heretics, the providence of God has made other provisions for their safety. The decree never dies, but it may slumber. Other laws may be made by the state to counteract it.

In the fall of Haman, let us anticipate the overthrow of all the opposers of the kingdom of Christ. All the schemes devised for overturning Christianity, will not only prove abortive, but will finally bring down vengeance on the heads of their authors.

We may here see how God can bring down the man of sin by the ordinary course of providence, without employing a single miracle. He can make his very enemies the instruments of effecting his designs. By them he usually cuts off those whom he devotes to temporal destruction; and by them also he can deliver his own people. When Haman

was cut off "many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." How well does this correspond with the increase of the true kingdom of Christ by genuine converts, when destruction shall have fallen on mystical Babylon! No king but the Messiah can reign in the midst of his enemies, and perform his will by those who design to oppose it.

This history, that has been thought by some unworthy of a place among the inspired writings, discovers, when attentively considered, the most surprising series of events brought about without a miracle, that ever was exhibited to the consideration of the human mind. Among the most admired works of genius, of all ages and countries, we will not find that the invention of man has been able to form a story, and connect a series of surprising events, like this true history. Homer, and Virgil, and Milton, and all the writers of epic poetry, have been obliged to use supernatural agency upon all critical occasions. To interest their readers, they must depart from the ordinary course of nature, and employ means that never really existed. Gods, and demons, and muses, are so necessary to the poet, that they still have their impression on the phraseology of poetry. If you prevent him from invoking the inspirations of his muse, from conversing familiarly with Apollo and the nine, from mounting to the top of Parnassus,

and from drinking of the Pierian spring, you deprive him of the chief resources of his art. To have recourse to his machinery, is universally granted to be his privilege, as often as there is a "*dignus vindice nodus.*" But the book of Esther presents us with the most interesting and surprising narrative; it gives us a series of wonders in producing danger and deliverance, yet the means employed are so much in the ordinary course of nature, that a careless reader scarcely perceives the hand of the Lord. Every event appears the natural and obvious result of the situation in which it is produced, but to create and combine these situations is as truly a work of Divine wisdom and power, as to create the world, or to fix the laws of nature. It is thus God rules the world; he is continually working, yet blind men perceive him not. Nature or chance is worshipped instead of Him whose power is necessary to the life, motion, and existence of every being.

This book, then, whose inspiration has lately been called into question, by ignorance, speaking from the chair of learning, commends its claims to me, in the most convincing manner, by its own internal evidence. No human pen could have produced it. The characteristic feature which I have pointed out proves it to be a child of God. Had man been its author, it would have been crowded with miracles. I challenge the world to produce

anything resembling it in this point, from the writings of uninspired men.

There is another feature in this history that proves it to be of heavenly birth. *There is no instance in which it gratifies mere curiosity.* While it informs us of facts, it informs us no farther than they contribute to the design of the Holy Spirit, and are important for instruction. In this feature it shows its resemblance to the teaching of our Lord, and to the writings of the apostles. So far from gratifying idle curiosity, our Lord declined compliance with respect to some points in which human wisdom would think it important to be informed. His communications manifest a striking reserve ; and even when pressed, he could not be induced to reply to any curious questions. In the writings of the evangelists and the apostles, how often do we wish that they had been a little more communicative ? And, assuredly, had they spoken from their own wisdom, they would have made a larger Bible.

Now, with this in his view, let any one read the Book of Esther. In how many points do we wish more information ! Facts are stated simply where we would wish to see them standing in connection with their origin. To see this argument illustrated in a striking light, let any one cast his eye over Gill's Commentary on this book, that he may see, from the Talmuds and Rabbinical writings, the

additional information that human wisdom seeks in vain in the book of God. There is not one point interesting to curiosity but what is supplied by their traditions or their conjectures. Had the book of Esther been written by the wisdom of men, it would have manifested its origin by gratifying curiosity in a similar way. Let us illustrate this remark by a reference to a few particulars in this history. The first I shall mention is the account of Mordecai's conduct in reference to the marriage of Esther. How human wisdom endeavors to justify or excuse him in this business, may be seen by looking into almost any of the commentaries. But this history relates the fact, without any observation either in justification or condemnation of him. We are left to acquit or blame him, according to the light of the Scriptures.

With respect to the conspiracy against the life of the king, who is it that would not wish a little more information? What uninspired writer would not have given us at least a sketch of the cause of the discontent of the conspirators, and of the means by which it was discovered to Mordecai? What a human author would have done on this subject, we may see from what human wisdom has actually supplied. Dr. Gill tells us that the Jewish writers say that the two conspirators were Tarsians, and spake in the Tarsian language, supposing that Mordecai did not understand it, but that he being

skilled in languages, understood what they were saying. According to Josephus, it was discovered to Mordecai by Barnabazus, a servant of one of the chamberlains. The latter Targum says, that it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, but the Spirit of God, speaking by the writer of the book of Esther, deigns not to inform us how Mordecai came to know the matter. He only declares that the thing was known to Mordecai.

The account of the rise of Haman affords us another specimen of this Divine wisdom. In giving an account of the rise of a favorite, every historian informs us of the ground of his acceptance with his sovereign; but not one word on this head here. We are merely told, "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him."

Whether the conduct of Mordecai, in refusing to reverence Haman, was blameable or justifiable, and the grounds on which he acted, are things that no human author would have overlooked. But whether he was right or wrong, or what was the principle on which he refused obedience, in this instance, to the royal mandate, this book says nothing. It merely states the fact—"But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." In order to justify him, the Targum and Aben Ezra say, that

Haman had a statue erected for himself, and had images painted on his clothes. Dr. Gill, who does not rely on this, strains hard to make out a good case for his client from the passage itself, and from conjecture. He thinks Haman claimed divine honors, because they were given to the Persian kings, and *might have been given to their favorites.* But there "*might have been,*" is a very bad foundation for an argument, though it is sufficient to remove a difficulty in a case that is attested by other credible testimony. This disposition to acquit the hero in an interesting narrative, in every part of his conduct, whatever may be its success in this instance, proves clearly that if the writer had not been guided by Divine wisdom, he would have given us a few remarks in justification of Mordecai.

The last instance to which I shall allude is the account of the affair that brought Mordecai into royal notice. We are not told what diverted the monarch from sleeping, nor what induced him to call for the book of the chronicles of his kingdom, nor what led to the reading of one passage more than another. Human wisdom would have gratified us on all these points, but the Spirit of God says no more than, "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that

Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus."

But though I perceive internal evidence in this book, confirming its authenticity and inspiration, I do not submit to the dogma on which some modern critics seem to act, that the authority of the canon is not sufficient to entitle a book to be admitted to the rank of inspiration, and that it is necessary for each book to be separately tried on the independent evidence from its own contents. Modern critics, in acting on this principle, resemble the lawyers, who excite litigation in order to obtain clients. They have an opportunity of displaying the treasures of their learning, and the reach of their ingenuity, in defending the claims of the Scripture without the authority of the canon. In judging of this internal evidence, they lay down first principles that are not entitled to that rank, and overlook first principles that demand universal respect. A first principle of the latter description is, that testimony is a sound source of evidence, and that the books of Scripture are to be received on the authority of the canon. In ascertaining whether the book of Esther, among other books, is inspired, we have to inquire, Was it in the collection called Scripture in the days of our Lord? If it was, its inspiration is past dispute. Jesus

Christ recognised the Jewish Scripture as the word of God. The apostle Paul represents it as one of the chief privileges of the Jews, that they are the depositaries to whom were intrusted the oracles of God, and neither the apostles nor their Master charge them with unfaithfulness in their trust. Now, the book of Esther, as Dr. Gill observes, has been generally received as canonical both by Jews and Christians. "It stands," he says, "in Origen's catalogue of the books of the Old Testament; nor is it any material objection, that it appears not in the catalogue of Melito, since in that list is comprehended under Ezra, not Nehemiah only, but Esther also, which Jerome mentions along with it."

As in rejecting the inspiration of this book, some modern theologians disclaim a first principle entitled to the most confident reception, so they admit some first principles that are mere figments of the imagination. Why is the book of Esther denied as a book of Scripture? Because it has not the name of God in its whole compass. Here it is taken as a first principle, that no book can be inspired, that does not contain the name of God. But where have they got this axiom? It is not self-evident, nor asserted by any portion of Scripture, and is therefore entitled to no respect. Whether a book may be inspired, though the name of God is not mentioned in it, depends not on any

self-evident first principles, but on matter of fact. And matter of fact determines in this instance, that a book may be inspired, although it does not express the name of God.

This objection, though it affects an appearance of wisdom, manifests a very inadequate conception of the nature of the word of God. It considers every book in the collection as an independent whole, standing unconnected with the other books. But the Bible is like the human body; all the books together form one whole, and there is no reason that one book should serve the place of another more than that the hand or the foot should perform the duty of the eye or of the ear. It is enough if the whole will of God is learned from the book as a whole. If it is contended, that every book of Scripture must contain the name of God, a like demand may be made with respect to every chapter, or any small division. The prophecy of Obadiah contains but one chapter; must it prove its divine origin by containing a whole body of divinity? Let the Christian form his views of the characteristics of Scripture from itself, and not from the arbitrary conceits of his own mind.

But if God is not expressly named in this book, he is most evidently referred to by periphrasis, and the strongest confidence in him is manifested by Mordecai. The faith of that illustrious servant of God is among the most distinguished ex-

amples of faith that the Scriptures afford. "Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Is not this a reference to God, and confidence in him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? "*From another place.*" Can there be any doubt as to the place from which he expected deliverance? Is not this an obvious reference to God? Does not this reasoning to persuade Esther, express the fullest confidence that the Jews would be eventually delivered, though the danger was so great and so inevitable, that no human eye could discern the means of preservation, should not Esther undertake the intercession? As Abraham counted him faithful who had promised, and believed that though Isaac should die on the altar, he should by him be the father of the Messiah, so Mordecai believed that when every apparent means of safety failed, God would on this occasion be the deliverer of Israel. Is it not from the retributive justice of God that he threatens destruction to Esther and her father's house, should she decline the intercession through unbelief? The very Pro-

vidence that is illustrated in this book is exhibited in the faith of Mordecai. He looked for deliverance through means, and if all apparent means should fail, still he believed that Providence would raise up means.

How clearly and strongly is this view of Providence expressed in the question to Esther—"And who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" He justly concluded, from the occurrence of such a danger, that the reason why Providence had raised her to the rank of queen, was to be the deliverer of her people. Mordecai's view of Providence is that which is inculcated in all the wonderful events of this singular narrative. It is the view of Providence which I wish to press on all my brethren in Christ. If times of trouble are before us, what better preparation for it, than the study of the book of Esther? If the great Antichrist, under any form, is yet to meditate the destruction of the whole Israel of God —if there is any just apprehension from the prophecies of Scripture, that great calamities are still before the Church of Christ, ought not every Christian to be nourishing his faith with this wonderful display of Providence, as the deliverer of those who put their trust in him? Surely there can be no harm in watchfulness and apprehension, when the enemies of the cross are so rapidly increasing, and when indecision and lukewarmness

so fearfully characterise the great body of the people of God. All the other symptoms of danger are not so dreadfully alarming as that spurious liberality that begins to look with complaisance on the enemies of Christ; an affectation of that love of man that manifests disaffection to some parts of the character of God.

Esther also manifests confidence in God, and a resolution to die for his people, if that should be the result of her application in their favor. She approaches the king, not confiding in her charms, nor hoping to escape destruction from the love or pity of a husband, but in the way of Divine appointment, in the time of danger, by much fasting and prayer. This is an exhibition of a true servant of God. The power of Jehovah, and the love of his people, are strongly manifested in the conduct of these two illustrious Israelites. If God is not mentioned by name, he is seen in all their conduct.

In the exhibition of the conduct of Esther on this occasion, we have a strong internal evidence of inspiration. Had human wisdom formed a heroine, it would have been likely to represent her from the first moment as intrepid and ready to encounter the greatest dangers with more than masculine bravery. But Esther is not presented to us in this light by this history. She comes before us in the usual character of her sex, and of the

ordinary attainment in the Divine life. She at first declines the hazardous undertaking for fear of losing her life. Her timidity is overcome by such arguments as ought to influence a believer in the God of Abraham; and she finally displays resignation and confidence, though not altogether unmixed with fear. Such is the usual conduct, such is the usual confidence, of the people of God.

This book, then, that exhibits the providence of God, is composed in a manner suited to its subject. God is everywhere seen in it, though he is not named. Just so God is every moment manifesting himself in the works of his providence, though he works unseen to all but the eye of faith. He supports and moves the heavenly bodies, while his name is not expressly written on the sun, moon, or stars, and though no herald voice proclaims him in the execution of his office. The Christian also has many ways of acknowledging God, without expressly naming him. The sun, from the time he rises till he sets in silence, preaches the God that made and upholds him: the book of Esther, from the beginning to the end, proclaims the providence of God, though it does not expressly name him.

But not only is the objection invalid, but every one of the same class is utterly unworthy of respect. A book may disprove its divine origin by what it contains, but in no case by what it does not contain. What is to be expressed in any

divine communication, is not for man presumptuously to determine by his own wisdom, but lies entirely with a sovereign God. We may as well say that God would not make the sun or moon, without writing his name on it, as that he could not inspire a book that did not contain his name. Vain man will be wise, though he is born as the wild ass's colt. Even in the things of God he must, by his own maxims of wisdom, pronounce on the authenticity of the inspiration of the All-wise!

Another objection alleged to the inspiration of this book is, that it is not quoted in the New Testament. Now, who made this a first principle? What authority establishes the dogma, that a book of the Old Testament cannot be inspired unless it is quoted in the New? Is it a self-evident truth? By no means. Does the New Testament teach this doctrine? No such thing. Where then has it obtained its authority? In the presumption of man. To be quoted in the New Testament is indeed proof of the inspiration of a book of the Old, and may therefore be used very properly as a confirmation; but not to be quoted, is no proof of a want of inspiration. The inspiration of the Old Testament is independent even of the existence of the New. Many books of the Old Testament, indeed, are quoted in the New; but this does not discredit such as are not quoted. To make quotations by the New Testament essential to the re-

cognition of the inspiration of the books of the Old Testament, is as unreasonable as to demand the quotation of every chapter and of every verse. It is perfectly sufficient that there is nothing in the book of Esther that contradicts the New Testament. As far as they teach on the same things, they perfectly agree. To the inspiration of the book of Esther there is not one objection that deserves a minute's consideration; and it bears in every page the impression of the finger of God.

The opinion that the settling of the canon is a matter of criticism, and lies fairly open to discussion, is a wicked and pernicious error. It is the suggestion of Satan to upset the authority of the whole Scriptures. It is impossible to deny the inspiration of one book of Scripture on principles that will not overturn any other. If the book of Esther is to be rejected because it does not express the name of God, then any person is equally at liberty to reject any other book, because it wants something that his wisdom thinks an inspired book ought to contain. That an inspired book must express the name of God, is a principle as arbitrary, and as far from self-evidence, as any other conceit that the human mind may entertain. If, then, its authority is acknowledged, equal indulgence must be granted to every other demand of human wisdom. If the book of Esther is to be rejected, because it is not quoted in the New Testament, then

there is not a book in the New Testament that must not be rejected, because there is no inspired authority quoting them; and, by consequence, every book of the Old must also be rejected, because the recognition of it in the New will in that case be of no authority. If the books of the New Testament can on sufficient grounds be received as inspired, although the canon is not settled by the quotations of inspired authority, then may the books of the Old Testament likewise. To reject one book, then, must admit principles that will overturn the inspiration of all. The settling of the canon is not a matter of criticism, but of testimony; and however mortifying it may be to the pride of the learned, they must receive it on the same grounds with the illiterate. The man of literature may indeed go a step or two beyond the unlearned. He may examine the books in which the testimony is contained, and with his own eyes he may read the catalogues of Origen and Melito, with any other accessible evidence. But even here he must rest on testimony. He has not seen the original manuscripts; and though he possessed the very autographs of the apostles, he must depend on testimony that they are really such. The canon of Scripture, then, the critic is not to ascertain by the rules of his art, but he must take it on the authority of testimony, and commence with it as a first principle.

It may appear surprising to some that the Christian public has not been more shocked with the late attempts to shake the authority of the canon, and to displace so great a portion of the word of God from its high rank. But the reason is obvious, from the quarter from which these attempts have proceeded. Had the reasons that some have alleged for rejecting the book of Esther, the two books of Chronicles, and the Song of Solomon, been urged by professed infidels, or noted heretics, they would have been rejected with horror. But when they have been ushered into the world from the pens of reputedly orthodox divines, and, for anything I know to the contrary, men of real godliness, the sinfulness of the attempt, and the danger of the principle on which the opinion is founded, have been concealed from general notice. The very grounds of rejection have a show not only of wisdom, but of concern for the honor of God and his word. Satan appears as an angel of light when he teaches that the book of Esther should be rejected, because it does not express the name of God, and because it is not quoted by the New Testament. What zeal does this manifest for the honor of God! what a high regard for the authority of the New Testament! Baxter says that the Jews were in the habit of casting the book of Esther to the ground before reading it, to express their sense of its deficiency in wanting the name of God; and the

thought is quite in the style of Jewish piety, and of the human wisdom of Christians. It is just such a thought as Satan will be likely to suggest to mistaken piety. But Satan conceals from them that by their zeal for the honor of God they rob themselves of all the advantages of that book. They do not see that they give up to him all the treasures of the knowledge of Providence that are contained in that precious record. He gives them a bauble, as the Europeans have done to barbarians, and he takes from them the most valuable diamonds. Satan suggests that the book of Esther cannot be a book of Scripture, because it is not quoted in the New Testament. Who would think that the infernal spirit of darkness has such a respect for the writing of the apostles? Arch deceiver! thy respect is affected for the purpose of overturning the writings for which thou dost profess this respect. Though the dupes who are deceived by thee perceive it not, thy keen eye discerns that this principle will overturn the Bible. When thou deceivest the profane and the ungodly, thou wilt employ a Carlisle or a Taylor; but when the children of God are to be robbed of a part of his word, thou dost prefer an evangelical divine as the deceiver.

It is on this very principle that the grand deceiver has overturned the foundation of all knowledge, through the affected wisdom of the philoso-

pher. Perceiving that false first principles lead to every error, Des Cartes resolved to take nothing for granted but the existence of his thoughts. He did not admit even his own existence as a first principle. This must be proved from his thinking. Here he imagined he had a foundation for all knowledge. But in rejecting his own existence as a first principle, and other first principles equally entitled to respect, he laid the grounds of universal scepticism, on which Mr. Hume afterwards built with such success. If nothing is self-evident but the existence of individual thought, no man has any evidence of the existence of anything but of himself. Some of his followers never advanced farther than this. The Egoists believed in their own individual existence, but, with matchless fortitude, each of them refused to believe that there is any being in creation but himself.

Now, this is just the spirit of the modern efforts to rest the authority of the books of Scripture, not on the canon ascertained by testimony, but on their internal evidence. For the authority of a book of Scripture they seek a surer foundation than testimony, however unexceptionably ascertained. They reject the solid foundation on which God himself has rested the authority of the canon, and have adopted a foundation that sinks from under the whole building. Like Des Cartes, they may themselves adopt many truths, notwithstanding their foundation will

not bear them; but others, like the Egoists, may reject almost any part of the Divine word. This wisdom, then, is both impious and foolish. In pretending to add strength to the bulwarks of God, it takes away their foundation. To reject a sound first principle is equally injurious to truth as to admit a false one. Either of them lays a foundation for error.

The book of Esther abounds with valuable instructions. To rob the Christian of the edification and comfort which it affords, is to do him the most serious injury. When critics find themselves at a loss for a field in which to exercise their ingenuity, let them indulge their vanity on the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Here let them gambol with the most frantic movements, and approach as nearly as they choose to the opposite boundaries of credulity and scepticism; but let them cease from the word of God. Let them not dare to put their unhallowed hands on the ark of Jehovah. Let the children of the Most High possess his word in its utmost extent; let them possess it without addition. The curse of God pursues both him that adds and him that diminishes.

One most conspicuous advantage afforded to the Christian by this book is, that it gives him a commentary to all the events recorded in history, with respect to the rise and fall of empires, the pros-

perity and adversity of nations, the progress and persecution of the Church of Christ, and the exaltation and degradation of individuals. In reading history, people in general look no farther than to the motives, designs, and tendencies of human action. Some are contented even with the knowledge of facts, without attempting to discover their source or to trace the connection of events. But in the book of Esther the Christian may learn to refer every occurrence in the world to the counsels of God, and to behold him ruling with absolute sway, amidst all the confusion of human agency, over all the purposes and actions of men and devils. In the afflictions of virtue, in the oppression of the righteous, in the prosperity of the wicked, in the insolence of power, in the persecution of truth, the philosopher finds it difficult to defend his god, and cannot defend him without making him different from the God of the Scriptures. He excuses his supineness by bringing him forward to reward virtue in another state, by the unavoidable necessity imposed on omnipotency through the establishment of general laws, from which it is impossible to deviate. But the book of Esther teaches the Christian, that the rise, and progress, and triumph of the man of sin, as well as his decline and fall, are according to the purpose of the Almighty—the All-Wise—the eternal. His glory is secured by the exertions of his enemies, as well as by those

of his friends. He raises up Haman and Pharaoh, as well as Esther and Moses. Such a God is too wonderful for the discovery or the approbation of human wisdom. This is too dazzling a light in which to view the Divine character, for any who are not taught of God, and who are not accustomed to submit in the most absolute manner to the decisions of his word. It is only the eagle can gaze on the sun. Many of those who, in some measure, are taught of God, are too weak-sighted to look on him in this blaze of light. They prefer to view him through the dark glasses of some human system of theology. My fellow Christians! I entreat you, as you value the authority of God, as you regard your own edification, study the book of Esther, and see your God ruling even over sin. Behold him in all the wars of conquerors—in all the intrigues of courts—in all the changes of empires—in all the caprices of monarchs—in all the persecutions of truth—as well as in all the progress of the Gospel.

The book of Esther teaches us to see the hand of God, not only in the great events of the world, but in all the transactions of men. It calls on us to see him in every occurrence of every day in our lives; and to trust in him for provision, protection, health, comfort, peace, and all the blessings of life. Innumerable dangers are around us every moment; it is only the arm of God can ward them off from

us. The most trifling accident might destroy us, as well as an earthquake; it is the watchfulness of Providence must guarantee our safety. How then is this book calculated to nourish our gratitude, increase our dependence on God, and invigorate our confidence! As we need the Almighty protection in all things, even when we see no danger, so even when the most terrible disasters threaten, he can defend. From how many evils has he delivered us in the course of our lives! How many wonders of Providence may we recount in our own escapes! Christians, study the book of Esther, and view God on your right hand, and on your left, all the day long. See his watchful eye upon you, and his guardian hand around you, both night and day. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

In Esther's success we find encouragement to undertake the most dangerous service to which duty calls us. We are indeed to count the cost, and be willing to serve the cause of God at the

expense even of life. But in this example, let us see that God is able to preserve us in doing his will, even when danger is most appalling. There may be safety in the midst of danger, when we go forward in the path of duty; but death itself is preferable to disobedience. *If I perish, I perish,* is the spirit in which the people of God ought to encounter the most appalling dangers in doing his will. In this spirit we can die in triumph, or live with joy and a good conscience.

If times of trouble are before us—if God is about to call his people to suffer for his sake, let us in the book of Esther alleviate our sorrow with the consideration that God rules in the storm. He can disperse the darkest clouds; he can preserve us in the midst of the thunderbolts; so he can give us peace and joy in the most violent death. Is it no consolation that persecution is by his appointment, and that in the end it will turn out for his glory as well as our good?

Even persecution may be commissioned to benefit the Church of God. It may effect what prosperity has kept far away. It may bring Christians into one body, as they have the one Lord. Their common sufferings will tend to unite them, and the afflictions of the house of God will tend to its purification. The millions who are Christians only in name, and who now by their union with the people of God, defile the temple, and cramp the

exertions of believers, may then take their proper place. The interests, the prejudices, and the habits of Christians combine to keep them in ignorance of the nature of Christ's kingdom, and of the laws and institutions with which he has furnished them. When worldly temptations cease to deceive, Christians may become more tractable, and what they did not learn in the time of their peace, they may soon learn in a time of danger. A man may learn at the stake what he could not see in the pulpit.

The consideration that the whole course of affairs on earth is directed by the overruling hand of Providence, as it is kept so conspicuously before our eyes in this book, may be highly useful to Christians in regulating their zeal in the cause of God. The mountains that lie in the way of the Gospel appear so impassable, that any means that promises to facilitate the passage is sometimes eagerly employed, without reference to the authority of divine appointments. The end is made to sanctify the means; evil is done that good may come; means are employed that God hath not ordained—that God hath forbidden. Any means are supposed warrantable, if it appears that the thing cannot otherwise be effected. It is to this baleful principle that the union of the church with the world owes its origin. The nations of the earth, in all their sins, are made a sort of Christians by name, and the enjoyment of the ordi-

nances appointed only for the people of God. In all the worshipping assemblies in Christendom, separate the disciples, and what a poor figure will they make in the eyes of the world! How would they support the Gospel! To act on this principle would, in the opinion of many, be to banish Christianity from the earth. However reluctant some may be to desecrate the ordinances of Christ, they think they must do it, or suffer Satan to triumph over Christ. They complain of the decay of religion—they pray for better times—they strive to breathe life into the dry bones—they warn sinners of their danger; but still they give them the ordinances of Christ, for they cannot work without them. Numbers are necessary for the existence of a sect; and Christ's ordinances must be misapplied in order to promote his system.

Now I entreat Christians who act on this principle, to consider what an affront it casts on the Head of the church. Who is it that governs the world? Has Jesus given up to the devil the power he received from his Father after his resurrection? Does he not still hold all power in heaven and on earth? does not the book of Esther show that his providence extends to all events? May they not learn here, that their Lord directs the actions even of his enemies to fulfil his will? Look here, and behold a few scattered Jews defending themselves, and destroying their enemies in all the provinces

of the Persian empire. In the cause of God, then, let them employ no means but such as are sanctioned by the appointment of Jesus. Let the ark of God itself fall, rather than put a hand to it contrary to Divine authority.

It is from the same principle that such an eagerness is always discovered to enlist the authority of kings and rulers in the cause of Christ, although they themselves may give all the weight of their example to the kingdom of Satan. Christians in general seem to think that there is no hope of protection for Christianity from civil rulers, unless they are nominally embodied in the ranks. For the sanction of power they barter the ordinances of Christ. In the book of Esther let them learn that their Lord is the King of kings and Lord of lords —that he rules in the midst of his enemies—and that he can make the most tyrannical princes the protectors of his people, when he pleases. Ahasuerus, who had by an irreversible decree doomed to destruction the whole Jewish people, was, without any conversion to God, without any proselytism to Judaism, made the most zealous friend that ever appeared in favor of the house of Abraham. He not only with the utmost zeal co-operated for their deliverance from the intended destruction, but gave up to them, to the immense injury of his kingdom, all their enemies in his dominions. He gave them unlimited authority to kill their ene-

mies and spoil their substance. The kings of the earth are the ministers of God; as such they ought to be honored; but give them not the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ. If they are not Christians by being born again through faith in the great propitiation made on the cross, and walk in newness of life, let them not be called Christians —give them not the ordinances of the house of God.

In the book of Esther the conductors of the various religious societies ought to take a lesson. I am afraid there are few of them that do not need it. The craft, the management, the bartering of the Christian name with Neologians and heretics for co-operation, money, and countenance, that some of them have employed, would induce one to think that they consider the Lord Jesus Christ to be dethroned, and that his friends must work without him till the restoration. I rejoice in all the good done by any of them. I wish I could convince them that they will do the more good the more closely they abide by the means afforded by the Head of the Church. Jesus rules on the earth as well as in heaven, and those who honor him he will honor to do his will. What have the Samaritans to do in building the temple of God? Has Jesus lost command over the treasures of the earth, that we must have recourse to the bounty of Satan? He will give us his contribution, no doubt; but

he will have a niche in the edifice, in which his statue must be worshipped. It would be more pleasant for me to be bandying compliments with the religious world, than to incur their displeasure by acting as their censor. But wholesome admonition is better than praise. Though the generality may despise it, some Christians may receive benefit. They may be led to see that in the propagation of the gospel, the Lord Jesus has no need of the countenance or co-operation of his enemies. The book of Esther will teach them that he can effect his purposes, even through those ignorant of him, without embodying them among his disciples.

In the Book of Esther the Christian may see the union of two things apparently irreconcilable—the free agency of man, and the over-ruling appointment of God. Philosophers have exhausted their ingenuity in endeavoring to fathom this abyss; but their line has proved too short. Some have erred with respect to both sides of the question. They have held that actions are not free, and that they are necessary in such a sense as to render man inexcusable in guilt. On this foundation some ground the duty of charity. If a man sins under a necessity of this kind, there is no propriety in blaming him for his conduct. In the book of Esther we may see that man's actions are his own, yet that they are, in another point of view, the appointment of God. We see here that

man is accountable and blameable when he sins; yet we see that these very sinful actions are the appointment of God to effect his own purposes.

The philosophers who contend for the freedom of human actions, generally deny the eternal decrees of God; because their wisdom cannot reconcile these two things with one another. And must not the penetration of philosophers fathom the deep things of God? Proud worms! can nothing be true of God, but what your minds can penetrate?

In reading the writings of philosophers on this subject, nothing can be more evident, than that one party has proved that men act freely, and that the other proves as clearly that the foreknowledge of God implies the certainty of all actions as they are foreknown. In so far each is right on his own side, but wrong as to the other. They will fight as long as the devil has use for the discussion, for, on their own principle, the dispute never can be settled. The human mind is not able to fathom the subject; they are struggling to grasp infinity; they are both right, and both wrong; truth lies between them; each of them has a hold of its skirt, but neither of them entirely possesses it; it cannot be seized, except it is believed without being comprehended. This removes it altogether out of the road of the philosopher, for he cannot receive anything for which he cannot account. While the

philosophers dispute, and, under the specious name of lovers of wisdom, prove themselves fools, let the Christian, from the book of Esther, behold the freedom of human actions in union with divine appointment. Let him not affect to strut in the buskins of the schools, and pretend to explain what on this subject he receives on the authority of God. Let him receive it, because the word of God exhibits it; not because his wisdom can fathom the depth of the Divine counsels. The most illiterate man of God, who receives with meekness what the Scriptures lay before him, is, with respect to the deepest subjects of philosophy, a greater philosopher than any of the mere sons of science. They may seize truth by the garment and tear away a shred, but the Christian, believing the Divine testimony, possesses the substance. I am sorry to be obliged to remark, that Christians too generally affect the philosopher on this subject. They have separated what God has joined together, because they could not comprehend the union; and, from prepossession in favor of one part of truth, have been led to give up or explain away the other. Some, out of zeal for the doctrine of the freedom of the human will, have, in opposition to the clearest testimony of Scripture, denied the decrees of God; while others, from a false zeal for the honor of the Divine counsels, have denied the freedom of human action. Both of them, inconsistently with their

character as Christians, act on the same principle of unbelief with the philosopher. They deny what they cannot comprehend. Like infidels, they assume it as a first principle, that nothing is to be received as truth that is not comprehensible to the mind of man.

When will Christians cease from their own wisdom? when will they in all things submit to the testimony of God? when will they practically admit, that God may know, and therefore call upon them to believe, what they cannot comprehend? Will man never cease to make himself equal with God? will the Christian never learn that he is nothing? Disciple of Jesus, go to the book of Esther, and acquaint yourself with the deepest point of philosophy. There see the solution of the question that has occupied the wise from the very cradle of philosophy, but which philosophy has never solved—which it is not capable of solving, on any other principle than submission to the testimony of God. Degrade not your Master, my fellow Christians, by modelling his doctrines according to the profane speculations of the schools. If any man will be really wise, let him become a fool in the estimation of the world, that he may be wise in the estimation of his God.

Let us read the book of Esther, and in the view of the overruling government of God, let us console ourselves in contemplating the melancholy

prospect of this world, in which the counsels of nations in every age are conducted by the enemies of God. We hear much of Christian nations and Christian rulers; but where is the nation in which the counsels of the ungodly do not prevail? where is the government that is conducted strictly on Christian principles? Statesmen, it is true, seek to manage Christianity like every other state engine, and therefore affect to support it. But where is the assembly of legislators, in which it is visible that the Lord God is feared as he ought to be feared? This is a gloomy subject for the contemplation of the man of God. But let him turn his eyes to the book of Esther, and behold the Lord God omnipotent reigning, and working his will by the very instruments employed by Satan to defeat his purposes. God rules even in the counsels of the ungodly. God will glorify himself even by the very empire of Satan.

It is a heart-rending thing to reflect on the sin and misery that prevail in this world. Let us relieve ourselves, in some measure, by this consideration, that God has done all things according to the counsel of his own will. Is the Almighty disappointed in his work of creation? has Satan prevailed over him because of his strength? or will any real dishonor attach to God by the rebellion of men and angels? Impossible; away with the accursed thought! These clouds before my eyes

are dark and lowering—I cannot penetrate that gloom—I see nothing but confusion and wretchedness. The very glory of this world is vanity; its highest enjoyments are unsatisfying. But though I cannot see through this dreadful darkness, I will look beyond it by the eye of faith. God reigns; all things therefore must issue in the glory of his name, and the happiness of his people.

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GOD OF PROVIDENCE,

THE

GOD OF THE BIBLE:

OR,

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL PROVED

FROM THE

PECULIARITIES OF ITS PROGRESS

BY

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"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."—MATT. xxiv. 14.

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"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."—*Matt.* xxiv. 14.

THE history of Providence, as it is unfolded in the Book of Esther, is a key to the history of the world. It enables us to unlock the mysterious counsels of the Ruler of the universe in the events of former times, and teaches us to refer to his Sovereign will, for the manifestation of his own glory, the most dark and frowning occurrences of the times in which we live. History that is not written on this principle, is only a book of atheism; and the Christian in reading it ought always to supply the defect. If the acknowledged advantage of this study consists in viewing effects in connec-

tion with their causes—if a mere acquaintance with facts is esteemed of small value without a perception of their springs, how little does that man deserve the name of an accomplished historian, who never sees the hand of Him who directs the least as well as the greatest of the events that take place in the whole universe?

The Christian is warranted to refer to his God the most trifling as well as the most momentous occurrences of every day. Nothing in God's world can be so mean as to be below his notice; nothing can be so untoward as to thwart his purpose. This is not only a truth, by the firm, open, and constant belief of which God is to be honored; it is likewise the source of never-failing consolation. We walk by faith, and not by sight. Everything about us seems to counteract God's word; and if we do not believe that God can bring good out of evil, and turn the most adverse events to the fulfilment of his own glorious purposes, our hearts will fail us every moment. But when we reflect that God reigns on earth as well as in heaven, and that every occurrence is directed by him, we have hope even in affliction, and confidence against the most vigorous opposition to the truth. What a comfort to reflect that nothing has ever taken place but what is according to the counsel of our heavenly Father! A deep and abiding impression of this consoling truth also directs and encourages

our prayers. It sends us to the throne of grace, not only when we need deliverance from great dangers, or when we seek the most distinguished blessings, but when there is the most trifling annoyance to be removed, or the smallest comfort or convenience to be wished. We may ask for a favorable state of the weather on the first day of the week, as well as for a prosperous voyage to a missionary ship ; and to be thankful for preservation through the unseen dangers of the night or of the day, is as truly our duty as when we have escaped in the most miraculous manner from the dangers of a shipwreck. The Christian ought to see God in everything. Our God breathes in the air, flows in the sea, shines in the sun, and lives in all life. In him we live, and move and have our being.

It has ever been the labor of philosophers to banish God from his works, and to carry on the system of the universe without him. Whether they are infidel or nominally Christians, their doctrine is not essentially different. If they recognise him as the Ruler of the world, they have obliged him to establish general laws, which bind himself as much as his works. These laws are good upon the whole, though they may be unavoidably accompanied with smaller inconveniences. Their tendency is to promote virtue, to discountenance vice, and to produce the greatest possible quantity

of general good; but from the particular grievances to which, from their operation, some may unhappily be exposed, there is no deliverance. God may look on, but he cannot interfere. What is an earthquake? what is a storm? what is an eruption from a burning mountain? They are the necessary consequence of general laws, which, upon the whole, produce good, which good must excuse the particular evils with which they are necessarily attended. The ship sinks overwhelmed by a tempestous ocean—the city is swallowed up in the bowels of the earth—and the inhabitants of whole districts are overwhelmed with boiling lava; but in all this God has no immediate hand. He can neither direct nor restrain the disastrous tendencies of his established laws. Silence, thou brutish infidel. It is the voice of God that speaks to thee in all these displays of his power. Brutish did I call thee? Nay, thou art worse: I will not degrade the brutes by the comparison. Do not the beasts of the field bellow and fly for covert to hide them from the thunderbolt of Jehovah? The voice of the Almighty in the thunder makes the hinds to calve before the appointed season; and wilt thou, insolent man, despise the threatening of thy Creator?

The denial of a particular Providence is grounded chiefly on disaffection to the sovereignty of God as manifested in his government. The facts are

not all such as the wise may think would occur, if God was concerned in the production or the control of them. They are not willing to say that he has not the power to effect all good and prevent all evil, neither are they willing to ascribe to him what is in their estimation a deficiency of good or a positive evil. The only thing, then, that remains to them is to remove him from the immediate administration, and leave the direction of events to the necessary operation of general laws. Combined with this principle, there is, no doubt, the operation of others, which may not be avowed. The direction of all the wheels of nature, the constant upholding of everything that exists, the supply of the continual returns of the wants of all living things, appear too undignified, as well as too troublesome an office for the philosopher's God. The same wisdom that bound Jupiter by Fate, and placed the gods of Epicurus at a distance from the cares and turmoils of the lower world, has still its unconfessed influence in the conceptions of philosophers unenlightened by the word and Spirit of God. As the heathen dramatists brought their gods on the stage only on occasions deemed worthy of their interference, so it is only by the establishing of a wise system of general laws that our philosophers will permit God to govern the world; and if he is at all suffered at any time to interfere, it must be only in matters of the utmost moment.

When they speak of a general Providence, they speak only to deceive. If God governs the world merely by his laws, we can speak of his providence with no more propriety than we can speak of the providence of Lycurgus in governing the Lacedemonians by his laws. God acts as immediately when an event happens according to the usual course of things, as when the laws of nature are interrupted. His immediate power is necessary to the existence and operation of the thing called law. Were he to suspend his agency, the law would cease to exist.

As the Christian is by revelation bound to consider God as ruling in all the events of the world, so there is a connection, relation, and combination among those events, that, when rightly viewed, will afford the most abundant proof of revelation. One event may be accounted for by the infidel, but a number of events may have such a relation to one another, and to a common end, that the most hardened scepticism cannot speciously deny that they have marks of an overruling Providence, and prove that the Bible is the book of God. I have in another tract pointed out this fact with respect to the wonderful events recorded in the book of Esther. But the same thing may be illustrated with overwhelming evidence from uninspired history. I shall in this tract illustrate it from facts relating to the progress of the gospel. This I design to be a

companion to that on the book of Esther. My intention is not merely to point out a satisfactory source of confirmation to a religion whose sources of evidence are incontrovertible, but to accustom the Christian to study history *as a Christian.* Nothing opens the mind more to enlarged views of things than an extensive acquaintance with history. But the principal advantage of it is lost, if it is not constantly viewed as a volume that reveals the ways of God. It is much to be regretted that the writing of it has been too generally left to men who scarcely ever see God in the transactions and events which they record. This has made the Christian either undervalue the advantage of the knowledge of history or has materially injured the minds of those who have read without care and without suspicion. Were the study properly conducted, it would be a delightful and profitable school of Christ. Instead of filling the mind of youth with admiration for what they should abhor, it would enlarge their acquaintance with the government of God, and enable them to see the mighty and the wise as puny insects, fulfilling the purposes of the God of the Bible, in their efforts to oppose them.

The prophecy recorded Matt. xxiv. 14, in connection with the means employed to give it accomplishment, affords the most satisfactory evidence of the truth of the gospel. So many obstacles stand

in the way of its fulfillment, that nothing but the Lord of omnipotence could have removed them. So many arts, discoveries, and inventions, then utterly unknown—such a train of events apparently casual, were necessary for the general dispersion of the Scriptures, that it is demonstrably evident that the Author of this production guides the wheels of nature, and that the God of Providence is the God of the Bible.

Infidels and the professors of a Christianity that the Bible disowns, are accustomed to refer in a tone of triumph to arts and sciences which, they remind us, do not owe their origin to the Bible. Civilization and all the comforts of society are ascribed to philosophy, while the Bible is denounced as the book that turns the world upside down, and genders hatred and contention among the children of men. A thorough acquaintance with that book would show them that its genuine productions are love, and peace, and happiness ; and that for the sake of its progress over the world the God of Providence has favored the world with those arts and improvements which have ministered most to the comfort and exaltation of civlized life. Even were it true that the triumphs of modern science and arts have no reference to the progress of the gospel—were it true that philosophy alone has exalted man to his present high state of intellectual and civil improvement, there is no ground on that

account to disparage the word of God, or to relax our efforts to give it to the remotest inhabitants of the earth. If arts and sciences can raise the state of man in this world, it is the Bible alone that can raise him from a state of guilt, corruption, and exposure to eternal misery. In proportion as eternity is longer than time—in proportion as future misery or happiness exceeds that of this world, in the same proportion is the progress of the gospel of more importance than that of arts and sciences. Yet a sounder acquaintance with the ways of God in providence and grace would have enabled such men to perceive that for all the discoveries in arts, sciences and manufactures, by which we are distinguished from the ancients, we are indebted to the Bible—to the God of the Bible, for the sake of the Bible. There is scarcely one of them that does not in some measure contribute its aid to extend the progress of the Scriptures. Whatever have been their origin, or the means of their improvement, they have been designed and directed by the providence of the Almighty for the gradual accomplishment of the wonderful prediction, Matt. xxiv. 14. Had not the Author of Christianity possessed uncontrolled power over human affairs, the gospel never would have spread. Jesus therefore prefaced the commission of the apostles with a declaration of this truth, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye therefore, and

teach all nations." It shall be my object, then, to point out a number of providential circumstances in the history of the world, tending to show that the Ruler of the universe directs the course of events for the fulfilment of this prediction, identifying the God of Providence with the God of the Bible. While each of these, viewed separately, has a favorable aspect towards effecting the designed object, they afford evidence of design; but when they are viewed in connection with all their number, variety, and distantly different epochs, as well as their gradual and seasonable appearance, to every dispassionate and impartial judge they afforded overwhelming evidence that the hand that produced them is Divine.

In pointing out the peculiarities in the progress of the gospel, which indicate a Divine energy and superintendence, the first thing I shall mention is its amazingly rapid and wide extension in the apostolic age. I admit that the rapid and extensive progress of a doctrine is not, abstractedly considered, evidence of its truth. If it is very agreeable to the human mind, if no part of society has an interest in opposing it, if it does not encounter strong prejudices, if it readily associates with popular superstitions, its general reception is not a matter of wonder. But the gospel is opposed to the strongest prepossessions of the human mind: it is not suited to the natural taste of any one of all

the countless millions whom it was designed to bless. To the Jews it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks it was foolishness. It had to encounter all the prejudices of ancient systems of religion, strengthened by the interests of the teachers that lived by them, and the trades and manufactures to which they gave employment. The priest and the people, the devotee and the sage, the man of virtue and the votary of vice, were all equally indisposed to receive this new doctrine, that saves sinners, not by works of righteousness of their own, but by faith in the blood of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. What power short of Omnipotence could have borne down the opposition created by such interests, and have made the gospel triumph in the conversion of men so hostile to its pretensions? Though naturally disrelished by persons of all characters, it brought men of all characters in subjection to its truth. It is this circumstance that makes its rapid progress evidence of its divine origin.

The instruments chosen by God in the first propagation of the gospel were evidently selected for the purpose of showing that its success depends on an Almighty arm. Had men of power, or men of learning been employed as the heralds of salvation, the rapid progress of the gospel would not have been so wonderful. But a number of illiter-

ate fishermen were appointed to sustain the claims of an unpopular truth, against all the power and learning in the world. They had to encounter all the subtilty of the Grecian philosophy, and in an age the most enlightened that ever paganism boasted. In this unequal conflict, instead of enjoying the smiles of the mighty, the sceptre of the world was swayed by an enemy; the heathen raged, and the Jews imagined vain things; the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ; for of a truth against God's Holy Son Jesus whom he had anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For three hundred years, the gospel was opposed by the power of the Roman empire; nor was any rebel sword ever drawn to protect it. Christianity was established by men without learning, without power, in opposition to the united efforts of the learned and the mighty among Jews and Gentiles. Had the apostles been philosophers, or had they found a Constantine as a patron, Christianity would have wanted one of the most convincing evidences of its truth.

A striking instance of the Divine superintendence in this matter may be seen in the previous removal of obstacles that, in the usual course of Providence, could not have been overcome. Though

God confirmed his word by miracles in the beginning of the gospel, yet he intended that it should be spread in future ages by ordinary providential means. Even in the apostolic age, miracles are but occasional, and were at no time the usual means of diffusing the gospel. In tracing the progress of the apostles, we may see this observation justified by innumerable examples. God did not usually interpose as he did in delivering Peter from prison by the angel: in general, he delivered the apostles, forwarded them on their journey, and gained them friends and protectors, not by miracle, but by the ordinary operation of his providence, with circumstances that would lead the careless to ascribe all to accident, or human agency alone.

Agreeably to this plan, Divine Providence had prepared the way for the gospel before its appearance, by a train of circumstances that may be clearly traced. Among these we may reckon the general peace that prevailed in the world at the coming of Christ. War prevents the intercourse of nations, and draws off the attention of men from the concerns of religion. Had the kingdoms of this world at that time been embroiled in war, the apostles would not have had access to them; they must have been confined to one country, and even there they would not have been so eagerly attended to. A general peace was a very unusual

thing: why did it happen at this peculiar period? Evidently it was ordered by the Sovereign Disposer of events, with a view to the propagation of the gospel.

In connection with this is to be considered the subjection of so great a part of the world under one ruler. The Roman empire is the greatest in the history of mankind. Throughout its extensive provinces an intercourse was established, that afforded the apostles a ready access from one country to another. The world was united into one family, that it might hear God's message respecting the salvation of sinners through his Son Jesus Christ.

That degree of civilization also that followed the Roman arms in the different countries of their conquest ought not to be overlooked in this account. The gospel, it is true, is addressed to the barbarian as well as the Greek; but it must be admitted, that there is a more ready access, as well as greater facilities for laboring with success, where there is civilization. That degree of civilization, therefore, which subjection to the Roman yoke had conferred on the different nations, was intended by Providence to facilitate the progress of the gospel among them. To the gospel, then, we indirectly owe that degree of civilization which philosophy can produce, and of which heathenism is capable.

As the amazingly rapid and extensive progress

of the gospel under the labors of the apostles was not owing to the natural efficacy of the means, so neither was it wholly owing to the miracles that accompanied it. Nothing can be a more striking proof of this than the little success of the gospel under the ministry of our Lord himself. Notwithstanding all his mighty works, he left but a few followers at his death. That the greatest miracle is not naturally able to convert the soul of man, we see in the case of the resurrection of Lazarus. Some who witnessed that mighty work, instead of yielding to the truth which it was intended to prove, went and told the Jews, who conspired to kill Lazarus, lest the people, through his resurrection, should believe in Jesus. If miracles and eloquence, and the most august and commanding majesty of address, could convert men, none who saw Jesus would have remained in unbelief. But to show us that the success of the gospel is owing to the power of Jesus over the heart of man, and not to any external means, he himself made fewer converts by his preaching than the apostles. How often did he speak for hours, without effect, to the obstinate and incredulous, while Peter by one address converted three thousand souls! If, then, under all the eloquence and mighty works of the Saviour himself, the gospel had but little success, and if under his apostles it spread with the rapidity of lightning, in opposition to obstacles natu-

rally insurmountable, its success must have been owing to an Almighty Power that opened the hearts of men to receive it.

The conveyance of the Scriptures through the hands of the Church of Rome is the next providential circumstance of peculiarity which I shall mention as evidential of the truth of the gospel. I do not mean to admit, that the preservation of the Scriptures from total extinction in the dark ages, was owing to that church. It has been often observed, that the Bible was preserved independently of the Church of Rome, and would have run no risk of extinction had that church been permitted to destroy it. The Eastern churches, and the various sects separated from the Western church, would have preserved the word of God, had every copy in possession of the man of sin been burned or buried. But my argument is founded on the circumstance that the Scriptures were, by an almost miraculous providence, preserved in purity and integrity, by a jailor whose hatred and whose interests demanded their destruction, or their corruption or mutilation. Nothing could have preserved the Scriptures in the hand of the Church of Rome but the power of Him who preserved Daniel in the midst of hungry lions. If the raven was thus, contrary to its nature, constrained to carry food to the prophet of God, we have the fullest assurance that it was owing to

the energy of His power who has been raised to the right hand of God to rule the universe, and make all things subservient to the progress of his truth. In this light, the apostacy of the Church of Rome is evidence of the truth of the gospel. If, by conveying the Scriptures, she has carried her own mittimus, who can suspect that document as a forgery? Let us form an illustration. Let us suppose that a magistrate receives the following letter:—"Sir—The person who brings you this letter is about to settle for some time in your neighborhood. With all the appearance of extraordinary sanctity, he is a a cunning knave; who, under pretence of loyalty, really designs to sow the seeds of rebellion. His austere piety and insinuating address have imposed upon many. I have therefore thought it my duty to give you this hint, that you may keep an eye on him while he remains in your district." Will there be any reason to suspect the genuineness of this letter? Would an idiot suppose the bearer of it to be its forger? Such, then, is the evidence of the truth of the Scriptures, from the circumstance of their being handed down to us through the Church of Rome. Every feature of that church is pointed out in the various views that are given of that system, which is designated the "mystery of iniquity," with a plainness that no impartial eye can overlook. Indeed, it is evident that the Church of Rome can-

not but recognise herself in the picture given of the man of sin; and, fearing the application, she has always labored to keep the Scriptures from the people. She has immured the Bible as a captive king, surrounded indeed with all the insignia of majesty, but destitute of any real authority. But is it not beyond measure astonishing—is it not a kind of miracle of Providence, that the cruel persecuting beast, that has devoured such multitudes of the people of God, has never been permitted to kill this illustrious prisoner? The jaws of the lions, hungry and enraged, have been locked, so that a tooth has not been put on the prey that lay so many centuries under their jaws. The Church of Rome has preserved that volume that is destined to destroy her; for she shall be consumed by the spirit of his mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of his appearing. Like Pharaoh's daughter, she has taken up the child of God, and nursed it as her own, for the destruction of her own kingdom.

The invention of the art of making paper, in the eleventh century, is another proof that the God of Providence is the God of the Bible. An art in the ordinary course of Providence absolutely necessary to the universal diffusion of the Scriptures, and of which there was not the smallest hope when the prediction referred to was given, must certainly be ascribed to Divine Providence, with

a view to that prediction. Such in all respects is this excellent art. The Romans wrote on parchment, or on the Egyptian papyrus; and as the latter was far the cheapest, it was generally used. But after the conquest of Egypt by the Saracens in the seventh century, the communication between that country and Europe being interrupted, the papyrus could no longer be procured, and all books were written on parchment only. This rendered books so scarce and of so great value, that they were beyond the reach of private persons altogether. We are told by those who have consulted the manuscripts of the middle ages, that such was the scarcity and value of the materials for writing, that it was usual to write on parchment from which some former writing had been erased. Robertson, the historian, gives us many curious facts, proving the scarcity of books previous to this invention. "Private persons," says he, "seldom possessed any books whatever. Even monasteries of considerable note had only one missal. Lupus, archbishop of Ferriers, in a letter to the pope, A.D. 855, beseeches him to lend him a copy of Cicero de Oratore and Quintilian's Institutions; 'for,' says he, 'although we have parts of these books, there is no complete copy of them in all France.'" "The price of books became so high, that persons of a moderate fortune could not afford to purchase them. The countess of Anjou paid for a copy of

the homilies of Haimon, bishop of Albertstadt, two hundred sheep, five quarters of wheat, and the same quantity of rye and millet."—Rob. Char. V. vol. i. p. 238.

Now, if the materials for writing had continued so high, the progress of the gospel, in the ordinary course of Providence, would have been effectually prevented. Instead of finding a Bible in every cottage, a country gentleman, of moderate fortune, could not have had the consolation of one for his family. How, then, could the Word of God have found its way to all nations? Who is it, then, that does not see that the God of Providence is the God of the Bible? Who is so blind as not to see that Jesus, as the ruler of the world, has directed to this invention for the multiplication of Bibles? Paper was invented to give accomplishment to the prediction of the universal spreading of the gospel.

Besides the importance of this art to the diffusion of the light of the gospel, let us consider its immense value to the improvement of society in knowledge of every kind. As much, then, as this art has contributed to the diffusion of general knowledge in arts, sciences, literature, laws, manufactures, and trades; so much is the world indebted to the Bible. Infidels, whose prejudices incapacitate them from reasoning philosophically on these events, may boast of arts and sciences to the disparagement of the Bible; but every discern-

ing eye may see, that all improvements are evidently bestowed on the world in reference to the advancement of the progress of the Word of God. A popish bishop may enumerate discoveries, which, in his ignorance, he can trace no higher than to their secondary causes, while they are evidently traceable to the finger of God, for the sake of that Bible which he hates.

This invention will appear still more providential, if we consider its date. Why did it not take place from the sixth to the eleventh century? Because God had determined to give up the world to the grossness of darkness during these ages. It was made in the eleventh century, that it might promote the revival of literature and improvement of knowledge that began to dawn about that time, which in the end contributed their aid to the Reformation.*

But the hand of Providence may be still more clearly seen in the invention of this art, when it is viewed in connection with its sister—the art of printing. The supply of cheap materials was of indispensable importance: still it was but half the work. Though the materials could have been procured for nothing, as long as books must be written

* Lord Kaimes says paper was made no earlier than the fourteenth century. His lordship must refer to the general manufacture as an article of trade, not to the date of the invention.

with the hand, their price must be extravagant. Books were, indeed, greatly multiplied after the invention of the art of manufacturing paper. Still, however, we have the most authentic proof that they were so dear as to be beyond the purchase of the bulk of society. Dr. Beattie reckons that the expense of writing out so great a book as the Bible would be at least equal to that of building an ordinary country church. And Dr. Robertson relates, that such was the extravagant price of books even so late as the year 1471, that when Louis XI. borrowed the works of Rasis, the Arabian physician, from the faculty of medicine in Paris, he not only deposited in pledge a considerable quantity of plate, but was obliged to procure a nobleman to join with him as security in a deed, binding himself under a great forfeiture to return it. In such a situation, it was impossible in the ordinary ways of Providence that the gospel should ever effectually pervade the mass of mankind. But here the hand of God interposed, and perfected the blessing of the art of manufacturing paper, by the art of printing. This art is supposed to have been invented in Germany or Flanders, about the year 1420. It was first performed by blocks of wood, in which were engraved all the characters of every page. The improvement of printing by moveable types was found out about thirty years later; and in less than a century after it was invented, it was

brought to perfection in France, by the illustrious Robert Stephen and his son Henry, so well known as the greatest printers and the greatest scholars of modern times. "By means of this wonderful art," says Dr. Beattie, "books are multiplied to such a degree, that every family (I had almost said every person) may now have a Bible, which, when manuscripts only were in use, every parish could hardly afford to have." The improvement by stereotype, lately invented, still lessens the expense of the sacred volume. The God of Providence has given this to the era of Bible Societies.

The era of the art of printing is strikingly providential—the century previous to the Reformation. The invention was perfected just in season to diffuse the resuscitated light of Divine truth. The invention of the art of manufacturing paper was the harbinger of the revival of letters; the invention of the art of printing was the harbinger of the Reformation. These angels of God wafted the artillery of heaven to the place of combat, to batter down the bulwarks of Babylon.

Can any man be so blind as not to see the hand of God in these inventions? The author of Christianity declared that his gospel should extend over the world. The dearth of books rendered this impossible. When two so wonderful inventions, then, cheapening books so immensely, are brought forward at the very moment in which they are

needed, can it be a matter of doubt who is their real author? Is not this quite in accordance with the declarations of Scripture, that Jesus governs all things for the good of his Church? In connection with these observations, let Christians open their Bibles and read the 31st and 36th chapters of Exodus. They will there see that invention and skill in arts are the gift of God to the world, for the sake of their utility to his Church. The Israelites were bond-slaves in Egypt, and it is obvious that no people could be more unlikely to possess the skill requisite for the completion of the tabernacle and its furniture; yet arts, and manufactures, and the utmost perfection of mechanical skill, were bestowed on them for perfecting the house of God. "See, I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee," Exodus xxxi. 2—6. If, then, God gave such gifts for the sake of the

carnal ordinances of the Jewish dispensation, shall the various arts, sciences, discoveries, inventions, and manufactures, which in one way or other contribute to the success of the gospel, be considered as originating in chance, or undirected by the Providence of the great Head of the Church? He is ill instructed in the ways of God who can think so.

The invention of spectacles is one of the greatest blessings of the Christian; yet, perhaps, he seldom thinks of ascribing this to the Providence of his Saviour. This enables us to read the Word of God at a time when, without this, reading would be uncomfortable and often impossible. How has this invention facilitated the labors also of those who have been engaged in various ways on the Scriptures for the general good? How much more labor can learning now bestow on the Bible, than it could have done had this invention never existed? Philosophy, by the pen of Lord Kaimes, celebrates the invention with respect to its utility to literary men. "So useful an invention," says his lordship, "cannot be too much extolled. At a period of life when the judgment is in maturity, and reading is of great benefit, the eyes begin to grow dim. One cannot help pitying the condition of bookish men before that invention, many of whom must have had their sight greatly impaired, while the appetite for reading was in vigor." What a shame to Christians if they are unmindful of the Author of

this blessing, when the philosopher is so grateful! May not the Christian go a step beyond the philosopher, and give the glory of the invention to God, for the purpose of reading his word? Spectacles were invented by Alexander Spina, a monk of Pisa, about the end of the thirteenth century. See how God can employ the very drones of society. Jesus gives ingenuity to those who know him not, that they may in many different ways contribute to effect his purposes. The date of the invention is also remarkable. Why was it not given to the ingenuity of the ancients? It would not then have served God's people in reading the Bible. Why was it not given before the eleventh century? Because there was then no Bible to be read. But now the invention comes into operation, that it may be ready in the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the Reformation put the Bible into the hands of the people.

The progress of the art of reading itself is not to be overlooked in this matter: it is evidently providential. During the dark ages, ignorance was so complete and general, that few persons could either read or write. Let us listen to Dr. Robertson: "Literature, science, taste, were words little in use during the ages which we are contemplating; or, if they were at any time, eminence in them is ascribed to persons and productions so contemptible, that it appears the true import was little un-

derstood. Persons of the highest rank, and in the most eminent stations, could not read or write. Many of the clergy did not understand the breviary which they were obliged daily to use; nay, some of them could scarcely read it."

"The art of reading," says Lord Kaimes, "made a very slow progress. To encourage that art in England, the capital punishment for murder was remitted if the criminal could but read, which in law language, is termed benefit of clergy. One would imagine that the art must have made a very rapid progress, when so greatly favored; but there is signal proof of the contrary, for so small an edition of the Bible as six hundred copies, translated into English in the reign of Henry VIII., was not wholly sold off in three years."

Let us compare this with the present state of things, when every engine of saint and sinner is at work to educate the people. Is not all this that they may be able to read the Bible? This is no doubt God's design. This is expressly the design of all Christians in their efforts to this purpose. This is the grand object of all Sabbath schools, and of many great religious societies. The self-defence efforts of the man of sin or infidelity, are reluctantly obliged to contribute to the same object. Neither infidelity nor superstition had any intention to educate the people, till they found that they would be taken out of their hands by the men

of God. But though these two serpents may endeavor to poison the sources of education, the result no doubt will be, that men being taught to read, will at length be directed and permitted to read the word of God. Philosophy may scowl, superstition may whine, but notwithstanding all their exertions, the Bible will at length come into the hands of the people. Why did not infidelity manifest its zeal for the good of men in other ages by its cheap and useful tracts? Why does it now assume the appearance of love to mankind in this extraordinary way? Why does superstition now busy itself in teaching children to read, when for many an age it kept all ranks and all ages in ignorance? The ravens are constrained to carry food to the prophets of God. The time is approaching when the word of God is to prevail, and its very enemies must pioneer its way.

Indeed, the art of expressing thought by alphabetical writing is an invention so wonderful, and so early, that there is a great reason to ascribe it, with the art of speaking itself, to the immediate gift of God. But whether its origin is to be sought in the ingenuity of man, or to be assigned to supernatural agency, there can be no doubt that it was designed by Providence, to be the receptacle and the vehicle of the oracles of God. Without it the revealed will of God could not have been so conveniently, so intelligibly, and so securely conveyed to

all ages. The use of hieroglyphics, or picture-writing, is a natural expedient, but obviously unequal to the purpose of revelation. The employment of a different sign for every word, according to the manner of the Chinese, is also an expedient that would naturally occur to the ingenuity of man. But this likewise is unsuitable as a treasury for knowledge universally necessary. The labor of acquiring this knowledge is too great to be of extensive use to the bulk of mankind. An alphabet is an invention the most profound and the most useful that is in the possession of the human race. As it is the most perfect, so there is reason to believe that it was the earliest way of writing. It was employed by God himself in writing the commandments on the tables of stone, and it must have been previously understood, else it would not have served the purpose. History cannot reach its origin; sagacity cannot trace it to a probable source among the ordinary operations of human intellect. But rise where it may, God is its author. It was designed as a treasury and citadel for the Divine word. It was early given, because it was needed early. Each invention has appeared just in the nick of time when the God of the Bible needed it. Every day is producing or perfecting something that is destined to assist in the propagation of the gospel.

"The art of writing with letters representing sounds," says Lord Kaimes, "is of all inventions

the most important and the least obvious. The way of writing in China makes so naturally the second step in the progress of the art, that our good fortune in stumbling upon a way so much more perfect cannot be sufficiently admired, when to it we are indebted for our superiority in literature above the Chinese. Their way of writing is a fatal obstruction to science, for it is so riveted by inveterate practice, that the difficulty would not be greater to make them change their language than their letters. Hieroglyphics were a sort of writing so miserably imperfect as to make every improvement welcome; but as the Chinese make a tolerable shift with their own letters, however cumbersome to those who know better, they never dream of any improvement. Hence it may be averred with great certainty, that in China the sciences, though still in infancy, will forever continue so." From this it is seen that this philosopher, who was not peculiarly partial to Christianity, allows that this invention is at once the most important and the least obvious. While, therefore, he celebrates our good fortune in stumbling upon it, the Christian may be allowed equal gratitude to the providence of the God of the Bible, to whom alone, with any color of reason, this wonderful method of recording thought must be ascribed. If man stumbled on it, God put it in his way. If, as this philosopher confesses, without an alphabet the sciences must still

continue in infancy, let proud science do reverence to the Bible. To the God of the Bible is science indebted for its existence and progress, by the invention of the art of writing by alphabetical signs. Were it not for the Bible, science would have nothing of which she might boast.

"There is reason to think," says Dr. Beattie, "that this art must have been in the world from very early times, and that the use of an alphabet was known before the hieroglyphics of Egypt were invented." "In China, they understood writing and printing too, and have done so, we are told, for many ages; but to this day they have not invented an alphabet, at least their men of learning use none. They are said to have a distinct character for each of their words, about fourscore thousand in all, which makes it impossible for a foreigner, and extremely difficult to a native, to understand their written language." Now what a blessing is an alphabet! What a providential thing that it was invented in time to be the receptacle of the first written revelation! What would have been the consequence had the apostles written in Chinese? Is this accident? We might as well ascribe to accident the rising of the heavenly luminaries by night. Why did not the invention of alphabetical writing arise in China? Why was not the Chinese method practised in the countries where the alphabetical method prevails? What

power directed the falling of the die? Was it not evidently the hand that gave direction to the star in the east, and pointed to the cradle of the babe of Bethlehem?

It is not only as a depository of Divine truth that this invention appears to be providential. It deserves in a distinguished manner the same character as a means of communicating information with regard to the definite import of written revelation. From this invention it is easy to write our views of the meaning of the Divine oracles, and easy to become acquainted with what is thus communicated. A Christian can teach, convince, reprove, correct, exhort his brethren, with little inconvenience to either, though separated by the utmost limits of the earth. Revelation thus becomes better understood, errors are more easily put down, and the flame of Christian zeal can be communicated from breast to breast among all the people of God in the world.

Indeed, the facilities that this gives also to the communication of error may be esteemed a heavy drawback from this blessing. But this evil principally affects only those in whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine into them. This woe is to the world. All the errors that ever have been circulated, cannot injure the glory of the gospel,

and they are a trial of the faith of God's people. Had no error ever been broached, the people of God would not now possess so full and steady a knowledge of the import of the Divine word. Nothing can contribute more to a deep acquaintance with everything contained in the word of God than the constant necessity of defending the truths against the perversions of human ingenuity. And nothing is better calculated to humble the Christian in the dust before his God, that he may be kept in the profession of what is right, enlightened in the discovery of what he does not know, and guided as a child by the hand of the Heavenly Teacher. It convinces him of the necessity of the teaching of the Spirit, as well as of the word of God. With all the evils that result from the perversion of the Scriptures through the facilities of alphabetical writing, no enlightened Christian can hesitate a moment to avow, that it is one of the greatest blessings of Providence to the children of God. The best medicines may be used as poisons, yet they are still an immense blessing to the afflicted.

Alphabetical writing has conferred innumerable temporal blessings on the human race. It propagates discoveries, inventions, and every kind of knowledge, with the rapidity of lightning, to the utmost ends of the earth. It makes the whole human race one family. The sciences, we have

seen, could hardly exist without it, and without doubt they never could extend their progress considerably without its aid. Is there any art that is not indebted to it for its prosperity? Let the proud sons of science, then—let the votaries of all the arts, acknowledge their obligations to the Bible. The God of the Bible, for the end of the Bible, gave an alphabet to literature.

The reformation of religion that commenced in the beginning of the sixteenth century is one of the most astonishing events in the annals of the world, and its history clearly manifests the providence of God in giving effect to the wonderful prediction respecting the progress of the gospel. After the almost total extinction of Divine truth for many an age, the re-appearance and progress of the gospel in the very camp of the enemy, are satisfactory evidence that the God of Providence is the God of the Bible. The united power of the antichristian church and empire was unable to crush the efforts of an obscure monk.

In the accomplishment of this event there is discoverable a chain of circumstances that never could have been connected but by a Divine hand. All the secondary causes of the Reformation were so timed and combined, as to leave no room to question that they were secretly moved and guided by a great First Cause. Infidelity, both ancient and modern, has been in the habit of considering that

a successful attempt to account for the secondary cause of an event or phenomenon, is sufficient to disprove the agency of a superintending Providence. However unjustly it may be supposed that Aristophanes charged the philosophy of Socrates, it is at least evident from the Nubes, that such was the way of reasoning at that time employed by atheistical ingenuity. If the phenomena of rain, thunder, lightning, &c., could be accounted for by natural causes, a First Cause was supposed unnecessary. If it never thundered without clouds, where was the evidence from thunder of the existence of Jupiter? That the same mode of reasoning was thought just by the atheists in the days of Horace, is seen in his assertion, whether his intention were serious or ludicrous, that he was converted from the system of Epicurus by having heard thunder in a clear sky. The clouds, it was thought, might naturally produce thunder; but if it thundered without clouds there must, they thought, be a Jupiter to effect the work. This was shallow philosophy, and yet it was not a great deal deeper in Dr. Darwin, the celebrated physiologist, who attempted to strengthen the foundations of atheism by accounting for the instincts of animals. By proving that the newly-dropped lamb seeks the teat of the dam by smell, and other such discoveries, he hopes to hide from us the hand of the God of nature. But his science only traces the law a step higher, and

however far it may proceed, God must be at its origin. The lamb is guided by smell. Let not the atheist triumph. Who gave smell to the young animal? No series of second causes can ever dispense with the necessity of an almighty, independent First Cause.

To throw discredit on the Reformation, infidelity has thought it sufficient to account for its origin and progress, and to repel those attacks, the influence of second causes has been sometimes injudiciously overlooked or undervalued. But the sound philosopher, the well-taught Christian, has no need to depreciate the means by which this glorious event has been accomplished. When he views a series of circumstances adapted to an end, he traces them to their cause, and recognises the God of the Bible in the God of Providence. The apostle tells us, that if the gospel be hid, it is hid only from those who are blinded by the god of this world. In like manner, if God hides himself in his providence, it is only from the eyes of the wilfully and obstinately blind. His agency and power are every day proclaimed in all the events of the world. Put the scattered parts together, and they will invariably compose the name of God.

The sober pen of history reasons in this way in the hand of Dr. Robertson, a writer by no means inclined towards fanaticism. "To overturn," says he, "a system of religious belief, founded on an-

cient and deep-rooted prejudices, supported by power, and defended with no less art than industry, to establish in its room doctrines of the most contrary genius and tendency, and to accomplish all this, not by external violence or the force of arms, are operations which historians, the least prone to credulity and superstition, ascribe to that Divine Providence which, with infinite ease, can bring about events which to human sagacity appear impossible. The interposition of Heaven in favor of the Christian religion, at its first publication, was manifested by miracles and prophecies wrought and uttered in confirmation of it. Though none of the Reformers possessed, or pretended to possess, these supernatural gifts, yet that wonderful preparation of circumstances which disposed the minds of men for receiving their doctrines, that singular combination of causes which secured their success, and enabled men, destitute of power and of policy, to triumph over those who employed against them extraordinary efforts of both, may be considered as no slight proof, that the same hand which planted the Christian religion protected the reformed faith, and reared it, from beginnings extremely feeble, to an amazing degree of vigor and maturity."

As in so very slight a sketch I can only touch on the subject, I shall merely point to some of the providential circumstances that paved the way for

the Reformation, or contributed to its establishment.

The first thing I shall mention is, the peculiarity of the time in which Luther appeared. Had the same man appeared in other times, and in other circumstances, all his efforts would have been unavailing. "Waldus in the twelfth century," says Dr. Robertson, "Wickliffe in the fourteenth, and Huss in the fifteenth, had inveighed against the errors of popery with great boldness, and confuted them with more ingenuity and learning than could have been expected in those illiterate ages in which they flourished. But all these premature attempts toward a reformation proved abortive. Such feeble lights, incapable of dispelling the darkness which then covered the Church, were soon extinguished; and though the doctrines of these pious men produced some effects, and left some traces in the countries where they taught, they were neither extensive nor considerable. Many powerful causes contributed to facilitate Luther's progress, which either did not exist, or did not operate with full force in their days; and at that critical mature juncture when he appeared, circumstances of every kind concurred in rendering each step that he took successful."

Among the providential circumstances that called forth the spirit of reformation, the sale of indulgences stands eminently conspicuous. Had

it not pleased God to permit this monstrously iniquitous traffic to proceed to an enormous extravagance, Luther would not have been roused against the system of popery; for it is to be remembered, that when he commenced his attack, he had no enlarged view of reformation, and was still in his conscience, as well as his profession, a sincere member of the Church of Rome. Had not the hideous enormities of the venders of indulgences called his attention, he might have lived and died in that community, as other good men had done before him.

This enormity not only roused the indignation of Luther, it also contributed to open the ears of men to his accusations. Indulgences had become such a grievous nuisance to both princes and people, that they listened with eagerness to the man who had the boldness to call their utility in question. How admirable is the Divine wisdom. The very extravagance of sin is overruled for good! The Reformation was owing to indulgences!

The writings of many learned men about this time, who were by no means favorable to his cause, served also to give him success. "The greater part of the ingenious men," says Dr. Robertson, "who applied to the study of ancient literature towards the close of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, though they had no intention, and perhaps no wish, to overturn the established system of religion, had discovered the

absurdity of many tenets and practices authorised by the Church, and perceived the futility of those arguments by which illiterate monks endeavored to defend them. Their contempt of these advocates for the received errors led them frequently to expose the opinions which they supported, and to vindicate their ignorance with great freedom and security. By this, men were prepared for the more serious attacks made upon them by Luther; and their reverence both for the doctrines and persons against whom he inveighed was considerably abated. This was particularly the case in Germany. When the first attempts were made to revive a taste for ancient learning in that country, the ecclesiastics there, who were still more ignorant than their brethren on the other side of the Alps, set themselves to oppose its progress with more active zeal; and the patrons of the new studies, in return, attacked them with greater violence. In the writings of Reuchlin, Hutton, and the other revivers of learning in Germany, the corruptions of the Church of Rome are censured with an acrimony of style little inferior to Luther himself."

The peculiarity of the character of Luther also, is another providential circumstance of great moment. Why, exactly at this crisis, did a man arise who was such a prodigy of intrepidity, ardor, and unquenchable zeal? Had he been a man of ordi-

nary character, with all the light of the millennium, his labors might not have ended in the Reformation. His peculiar character was necessary to combine the other favorable circumstances. Had this link been wanting, the whole chain would have been unconnected. Erasmus had previously animadverted on the corruptions and superstitions of Rome; yet from timidity, the love of ease, and dread of losing his popularity and pensions, Erasmus died in a Church, almost every absurdity of which he had lashed with most poignant ridicule. It requires an age to produce a great man in some departments, but a Luther is not to be found in every millenary. Who is so blind as not to see that God made him expressly for his work? Had not the fire of God kindled in his soul, would courage so romantic have led him to attack all the hosts of the man of sin in their strongest intrenchments? His faith was as bold as that of Jonathan, when, with his armor-bearer, he attacked the hosts of the Philistines. "And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armor, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

The talents and acquirements of this great reformer were also providentially adapted to his situation. Had he not been both learned and tal-

ented to an eminent degree, his piety, zeal, and courage would have failed in his great attempt. He had to discuss the subjects of controversy with all the proverbial subtilty of the Church of Rome. "Though born of poor parents," says Dr. Robertson, "he had received a learned education, during the progress of which he gave many indications of uncommon vigor and acuteness of genius." "He had been taught the scholastic philosophy and theology which were then in vogue, by very able masters, and wanted not penetration to comprehend all the niceties and distinctions with which they abound; but his understanding, naturally sound, and superior to everything frivolous, soon became disgusted with those subtil and uninstructive sciences, and sought for some more solid foundation of knowledge and of piety in the holy Scriptures." Thus armed, he feared not to challenge even the universities and the most learned men of the world.

We may see, also, the providence of God in determining his course of life for the obtaining of this education, as well as possessing himself of the holy Scriptures. "The death of a companion, killed by lightning at his side, in a violent thunderstorm, made such an impression on his mind as cooperated with his natural temper in inducing him to retire into a convent of Augustinian friars, where, without suffering the entreaties of his pa-

rents to divert him from what he thought his duty to God, he assumed the habit of that order." Thus even his mistaken devotion was the means of fitting him for his work; and his original zeal for popish piety was the means of qualifying him to overturn popery. In this situation he found the word of God, which in another he might never have seen. "Having found a copy of the Bible, which lay neglected in the library of his monastery, he abandoned all other pursuits, and devoted himself to the study of it with such eagerness and assiduity as astonished the monks, who were little accustomed to derive their theological notions from that source. The great progress which he made in this uncommon course of study augmented so much the fame, both of his sanctity and of his learning, that Frederic, elector of Saxony, having founded a university at Wittemberg on the Elbe, the place of his residence, Luther was chosen first to teach philosophy, and afterwards theology there, and discharged both offices in such a manner that he was deemed the chief ornament of that society."

The character of Pope Leo X. seems also to have been providentially suited to forward the Reformation. His profuseness, luxury, liberality, schemes of family aggrandizement, all contributed to force him to push the exactions of the Church as far as possible, which smoothed the way for the doctrines of Luther; while his easy temper and voluptuous-

ness disinclined him to rouse himself to the immediate suppression of the disasters occasioned by this troublesome monk.

The policy of the court of Rome towards Luther was not marked by its usual cunning. It neither made a vigorous effort at first to crush him, nor stooped to win him by a partial reformation of abuses; but by a vacillating system lost the critical moment in which he might have been ruined, or reconciled to the Church. The arts of diplomacy were contrived and perfected in the court of Rome, yet, by a kind of infatuation, the most obvious policy was neglected towards the reformer. No similar disregard to its interests can be pointed out in the history of that politic court. Surely the hand of Providence was here.

This forbearance was owing to other causes also. Leo imputed the whole disturbance to monastic jealousy, and left the monks of different orders to fight their own battles. But what, perhaps, more than anything else contributed to divert attention from the designs of Luther, was the gradual way in which light broke in upon his own mind. He was a Papist a long time after he commenced his career of reformation. He still conscientiously declared his deference to the apostolic see. It was not till future inquiry forced on him the discovery of the radical errors of popery, that he renounced

it as a system. To this gradual progress Luther owed his success.

The political schemes of Leo disinclining him to give umbrage to the elector of Saxony, Luther's protector, on the eve of the election of an emperor, was also favorable to the progress of the Reformation. Notwithstanding all the impetuosity of Luther's enemies, it was not till the year 1520 that he was induced to pronounce the bull of excommunication.

The death of the emperor Maximilian (1519), who was prompted to the support of the Church of Rome both by interest and inclination, was also of signal service to the cause of Luther. "In consequence of this event, the vicariat of that part of Germany which is governed by the Saxon laws devolved to the elector of Saxony; and under the shelter of his friendly administration, Luther not only enjoyed tranquillity, but his opinions were suffered, during the interregnum which preceded Charles' election, to take root in different places, and to grow up to some degree of strength and firmness." If, then, this powerful enemy was so opportunely taken out of the field and a friend substituted in his place, the hand of Providence may be recognised in the transaction.

The schisms occasioned by rival popes, with the enormities of these heads of the Church, as well as the scandalous lives of the clergy, were also, in

the wisdom of God, eminently serviceable in opening the ears of the people to the doctrines of this great reformer.

Peculiar circumstances adapted Germany to be the cradle of the Reformation. More than one half of the property of the country had fallen into the hands of the Church. From the wars between the emperors and popes, the most of the considerable German ecclesiastics joining the papal faction, seized the imperial domains and revenues, and exercised their imperial jurisdiction in their own dioceses. Many persons also, to preserve their lands from violence, had made a voluntary surrender of them to the Church, and received them back as fiefs. From these and other peculiar oppressions, Germany was, more than any other country, galled with the yoke of popery.

But a peculiar and remarkable feature in the constitution of the German empire was wonderfully adapted to foster the first efforts of Reformation. Unlike the other feudal kingdoms of Europe, which had succeeded in depriving the great vassals of all jurisdiction in their territories, the imperial barons had, by a train of providential circumstances, attained almost independent governments. It was owing to this that Luther found protection from the elector of Saxony, and patronage from the other princes of Germany. To this also it was owing that a combination among the

princes of the empire was able to withstand the power of the empire, and to gain toleration to the new religion. Had the imperial barons been in the same situation with the barons of France, they could not have protected Luther a single night, though they had been all his friends. Now, surely scepticism itself must look on this as very remarkable. By an opposite process, France and Germany, both feudal governments, came at this time to have a civil constitution totally unlike. In the former the barons were without jurisdiction, in the latter they were independent. The causes that led them to this were of long and gradual operation; and to prepare a cradle for the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the providence of God was at work for ages before its birth.

But even after we have got Germany divided into independent states, if we overlook Providence, there were a million of chances to one that the heads of these states would be hostile to Luther. Had all the subjects of Saxony been reformers, and the elector a persecutor, Luther must have been crushed. Why, then, was the elector a patron? Why were so many of the German princes among Luther's friends? Princes and nobles are not usually the first in a nation who receive the gospel. It was not with these that Jesus and the apostles were first successful. This is still more remarkable, when it is considered that the reigning elector

was not supposed to be a religious man, notwithstanding all the length he went to protect Luther. Every circumstance in the succession to the thrones of the different states of Germany about this time, appears to have been providentially directed with a view to this great event.

Nor is the patronage of the German princes the only thing to be considered as giving protection to the doctrines of Luther. That patronage would have failed, had it not been for other circumstances. Had the emperor Charles V. been at leisure to turn the weight of his power against them, he could have crushed all their exertions. The character and schemes of the emperor are therefore to be taken into the account of providential circumstances. His ambition involved him in continual wars with France: he was kept in awe of the sultan Solyman, the greatest prince of the Mahometan religion; and was not unfrequently embroiled with the pope himself. This diverted the attention of Charles from the reformers, and did not permit him to take that vengeance on them that he was well inclined to inflict.

Indeed, the character of the princes that filled the thrones of Europe at the time of the Reformation was so remarkable as not to be looked on as accidental. No age brought forward so many great monarchs; Charles V., Francis I., Henry VIII., Leo X., with Solyman the Great on the throne of

Constantinople. The wild work of ambition that chiefly occupied these destroyers of mankind gave an opportunity for the work of God to gain ground; and that it succeeded, not from the incompetency of its enemies, but in an age when all thrones were filled by the most illustrious sovereigns, is to its eternal honor. At first sight it may appear strange to class among providential circumstances favorable to the Reformation, what to most would appear obstacles. But a little reflection will convince any one of the justice of the observation. Had all the sovereigns of Europe been mere petticoat weavers to the virgin, they would have been more dangerous to the Reformation. Weak, superstitious princes of no ambition, being at peace among themselves, and concerned only for their religion, might have easily combined, and extinguished the light before it had been completely kindled. The talents of a Charles V. are not so dangerous to religious liberty as the superstition of a Ferdinand VII.

That all men are but instruments in the hands of God—that his own power, and not the zeal of his people, gives success and stability to his cause, is obvious from the state to which the Reformation was reduced by the victories of the emperor over the Protestant princes, and the almost miraculous providences that finally interposed for its deliverance and establishment in Germany. By the most singular phenomenon that history records, the

same man was the ruin and the establishment of Protestantism: and of both by treachery and dissimulation, abhorrent to the spirit of Christianity. Maurice was as unlike a disciple of Christ in the establishment of the pure doctrines of the gospel as he was in lending himself to their overthrow.

To the progress of the gospel, the revival of literature in the fifteenth century was eminently serviceable. The irruption of the northern barbarians into the provinces of the Roman empire had totally extinguished the light of science and letters. From the seventh to the end of the eleventh century, midnight darkness brooded over the human mind, and man had lost the use of his intellectual faculties. The grossest superstition and the most profound ignorance everywhere prevailed. Many curious facts, illustrative of this, are given by Dr. Robertson in his notes to the History of Charles V. Towards the beginning of the twelfth century, the human mind began to awaken from its lethargy in Europe, and science and letters advancing till the sixteenth century, were at such a height as materially to assist the Reformation. Even at that time the support that the Reformation received from letters was so well understood, that they had the same friends and the same enemies. However often science and letters have been perverted to oppose Christianity and its truths, their natural use is to confirm truth of every kind. As truth

has in all things a real foundation and evidence, it cannot be doubted that light of every kind will be favorable to its discovery and proof. The learned and the scientific have often used their talents to obscure and perplex truth; but in every instance, as far as they have employed their acquirements to support their errors, they manifest ignorance. Greater learning and sounder science will not only dispel the mists of sophistry, but exhibit their object in a stronger blaze of light. Truth is burnished by friction; it is only the quackery of science and literature that have ever lent their aid to infidelity. Geology has often threatened the Mosaic account of creation; but after every successive generation of geologists has proved the preceding to be fools, as far as that subject can be called a science, and not wild theory, its real discoveries are corroborative of the doctrine of Moses. It is only science falsely so called that will ever bear against the Bible. Truth and error cannot have equal evidence: as light discovers evidence, it must be decidedly on the side of the former. The foundation of the one is on a rock, that of the other is on the sand; and though the eye sees no difference on the surface, learning mines to the bottom and discovers the reality. Accordingly, though perverted learning struggled long to wrest the Scriptures to the proof of popery, or at least to make them sink their voice, yet a more profound criti-

cism, expounding the laws of language, has now driven the most learned abettors of that system out of the field of critical controversy, and obliged them to take refuge in implicit faith. They rest their cause on the authority of the Church to affix meaning to words and phraseology—not on the authority of the laws of criticism to ascertain that meaning. Popery sprung out of darkness, was nursed by darkness, and will perish with darkness. She has not indeed wanted learned men to defend her; but though they have ably endeavored to give life to their image, by snatching a portion of the fire from heaven, her most renowned magicians have been able to exhibit only some dexterous feats of spiritual galvanism. Whatever she may still pretend, she does not need a stranger to inform her that learning is her mortal enemy. She knows well that ignorance is the mother of devotion, though she is now ashamed to own that maxim. She may indeed wish some of her wily sons to learn the use of the arms with which she is assailed, that they may parry the thrusts aimed at her; but her main reliance is in keeping her subjects in ignorance. Whatever she may pretend about giving the Scriptures to the learned of the laity, it is evident to the smallest portion of discernment, that on her principles the Scriptures are unnecessary equally to the educated as to the ignorant.

Such being the case, let us admire the Provi-

dence that revived learning before the beginning of the sixteenth century, to provide weapons for the children of light for the assault of the absurdities of superstition. The spirit of prophecy had given up Europe for a specified period to the darkness of popery, and the light of letters as well as Christianity was extinguished; but God had determined to give the man of sin a mortal blow in the year 1517; and in order to effect this in the ordinary course of his providence, he lighted again the torch of literature. Had the same ignorance continued that reigned from the seventh to the eleventh century, all the efforts of Luther would have been fruitless. God provided this powerful train of artillery to beat down the walls of the antichristian city. Human ingenuity is continually perfecting this engine of war, and it will not cease to improve while there is a stone upon a stone in Babylon. For the revival of literature, then, for its improvements, and present high state of perfection, we are indebted to the designs of Providence in accomplishing the predictions of the Divine word.

Should infidelity growl, and speak of her merits in the cause of letters, she may be silenced as effectually as superstition. It is obvious that to the Bible we owe the thorough knowledge of the ancient languages which the learned of this day possess. What but the knowledge of the Bible is the great incentive to the study of Greek and

Hebrew? Indeed it is principally to this that we owe the acquaintance with all dead languages, as well as the study of the laws of criticism. Let all nations become infidel, and ancient literature will perish. Critical accuracy in composition has arisen more from the necessity of determining the laws of criticism in the interpretation of the Scriptures, than from any other cause. Who would submit to labors so irksome and wasting, if nothing but an idle curiosity were to be gratified by the acquisition? If infidels themselves have any tincture of ancient literature. they owe it to those institutions that have the elucidation of the Bible for their object.

Even the learned folly of our universities is not undirected by Divine Providence. Their adoration of the remains of pagan antiquity, the wasting of their lives in the unedifying elucidation of writings, to say the least, of no importance to society—the grave importance that they attach to the most frivolous pursuits—are indeed a melancholy proof that learning has no tendency to bring us near to God. But their idle labors are made to serve a better cause. Something is thereby contributed to the stock of knowledge that fits for the translation and elucidation of Scripture. When I see genius and learning wasting half a century in examining the Athenian stage, —when I find the scores of corrections by the

manuscripts of a Greek Pliny, and the hundreds of corrections from conjecture, I sigh for the folly of man. But I am consoled when I reflect that this frivolous occupation will cast some light on revelation; and that the laws of the Greek language are thus better ascertained. Every discovery as to the syntax and laws of the Greek and Hebrew languages is a pearl of inestimable value to the Christian, and will ultimately serve to perfect the translation of the word of God. The battle of the critics is as fierce on the Plutus of Aristophanes, as those of theologians on the Epistle to the Romans. The result of both may ultimately serve the cause of truth.

If the revival of learning was necessary for the defence of the doctrines of Scripture, it was still more necessary for the making of translations of the Bible into modern languages. Luther, we are told, did more for the success of the gospel, by translating the Scriptures, than by all his other labors. All the efforts of the preachers would have been comparatively trifling, had they not been able to give the people the Scriptures into their own hands. This enabled every man to judge between the doctrines of Rome and those of the Divine word, and fixed a preacher in every house. What an admirable Providence, then, was it that in some measure supplied the gift of tongues.

That acquaintance with the original languages

which is now so common and so easily attainable, is also so admirably serviceable in enabling missionary societies to provide men who, with tolerable correctness, are qualified to make translations of the Scriptures into the languages of the people among whom they labor. In this way the Bible is travelling fast over India.

The amazing facility with which some persons acquire the knowledge of languages, their taste for the prosecution of this study, combined with an ardent zeal to publish the gospel among the heathen, is a strong indication of the hand of Providence. This may be seen in Judson, the American missionary of the empire of Burmah, and in many other missionaries. But all the qualifications that fit for missionary work were found almost miraculously combined in the late Dr. Carey, the missionary of India. Dr. Carey was as truly prepared by the providence of Jesus for the work in which he was to be employed, as Paul was to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Whether a talent is given in the constitution of the mind and by the acquirements of study, or by the immediate communication of the Spirit, it is equally the gift of the Head of the Church. Joseph Wolff also possesses this talent in a wonderful degree; and I think it cannot be doubted that his talent has been given for enabling him to testify of Jesus to many nations.

If men have not a taste for languages, and a

facility in acquiring them, they are not fit for missionaries. Without a knowledge of the language of the people to whom they are sent, though they had the fervent zeal of a seraph, they are dumb. Such a talent is rare. When, therefore, it presents itself to missionary societies, is it not to be ascribed to Him who separated Paul for the service of the gospel from his mother's womb? But energy, patience, and dauntless intrepidity, combined with innumerable other qualifications necessary for a missionary, are evidently the gift of Providence. The fortitude, energy and decision of character that so strongly marked Paul as an apostle, were evident in Saul, the persecuting Pharisee. Who can doubt that the extraordinary talents of the late Mrs. Judson were conferred on her in her constitution, for her labors in Burmáh?

Indeed, when all Israel shall turn to the Lord, we shall have what is equal to the gift of tongues. As they live in all nations, and, consequently, by one or other of them almost every language is spoken, when they are converted, they will be the heralds of salvation to all the nations in which they reside. Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, reigns on earth as well as in heaven, and he orders everything for the fulfilling of this great prediction.

The cultivation of the modern languages of Europe has been likewise directed by Providence

for the advancement of the knowledge of his word. For many centuries after their formation, the languages of Europe were utterly barbarous; and even after this revival of letters, all knowledge was conveyed in Latin only. It was as much the language of literature and science as of religion. If, then, knowledge has descended to the modern languages, and if such languages have been perfected for translating, it is owing to the care of Providence in providing a suitable vehicle to this word.

Of all the events in Providence designed to accomplish the prediction referred to, from the birth of Christianity to the present moment, the invention of the mariner's compass is the most wonderful. In the most marked manner this bears the impression of the Divine hand. When Jesus pledged himself that before the end of the world his gospel should be preached in all nations, the one half of the globe was not known, nor upon any principles with which men were acquainted, was there any possibility that the remainder could be discovered. At that time it would have been as reasonable to expect the discovery of the means to accomplish a voyage to the moon, as one to the countries on the other side of our globe. Hitherto there was no guide in the ocean but the sun and stars; and the most daring navigators durst not venture beyond the sight of land. The most distant voyages were slowly and dangerously per-

formed by creeping along the coasts. How, then, was the gospel to reach all nations? By the discovery of that wonderful property of the magnet, which communicates to an iron rod the virtue of pointing to the poles of the earth; and by conferring on Flavio Gioia, a citizen of Amalsi, in the kingdom of Naples, who observed the phenomenon, the sagacity to perceive its advantage, and to invent the nautical needle.* By means of this wonderful instrument, man is put in possession of the globe, and access to all its scattered islands is opened to him. He steers through the midst of the ocean, as if he had the sagacity of instinct like birds of passage, and finds his way in darkness through the trackless deep. Now, an invention that was absolutely necessary to give accomplishment to a Divine prediction must be from God. It is as truly divine as if the mariner's compass had been sent from heaven by the hand of an angel.

That this is the invention of a time that enjoyed not the use of the Bible, is by no means, as Dr. Doyle insinuates, to the credit of popery. God serves himself through the talents and even the very crimes of his enemies. It was not surely by his friends that Jesus was crucified, yet his crucifixion was the salvation of his people. The athe-

* It is said that the mariner's compass was in use in China from a very early period.

istical labors of David Hume had their use in the Divine government, as well as those of Martin Luther.

What a grand view does this give us of the scheme of salvation! Every event on earth is some way connected with it, and one plan may be traced in its operation throughout every age from the foundation of the world. The discovery of this property in the magnet was not only in operation for several centuries to give effect to the Divine prediction at the resuscitation of light, but the conferring of that property on the magnet had, in the very creation of matter, the intention of serving as a guide to the gospel to every island of the seas. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning. This key of the world was formed at the creation, but was not given to men till it was necessary to open it for the gospel. For what purpose was the magnet formed? why did its wonderful property remain so long undiscovered? why was it discovered at such an era of the world? why was sagacity given to perceive its use, and invention to turn the discovery to its destined purpose? How miraculously did a thousand chances meet in one grand design in the year 1302, just in time to second the zeal of the navigators of the fifteenth century, to provide a theatre for the gospel revival in the sixteenth!

We are next naturally led to the discovery of

the new world by Columbus, and to the discoveries of Captain Cook, with other navigators. Though the beginning of the fourteenth century put the key of the world into the hands of navigation, yet from various causes nearly half a century elapsed before it ventured to open any new seas. Even at the beginning of the fifteenth century, navigation had not advanced beyond the state to which it had attained before the downfall of the Roman empire. But as soon as skill in the use of this instrument was obtained by practice among the Italians, Providence determined to direct it to its proper design; and a series of events occurred, which are well worthy of attention from those who wish to be acquainted with the was of the God of the Bible. The Portuguese were the people destined by Providence to take the lead in the new discoveries, and a slight circumstance was the cause of them all. John the Bastard having, by his abilities and courage, seated himself upon a throne to which he had no legitimate right, to find employment for the restless spirit of his subjects, planned an expedition against the Moors settled on the coasts of Barbary. During his preparations, a few ships were sent before to sail along the western shore of Africa, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, for the purpose of discovery. "From this inconsiderable attempt," says Dr. Robertson, "we may date the commencement

of that spirit of discovery which opened the barriers that had so long shut out mankind from the knowledge of one half of the terrestrial globe."

Prince Henry of Portugal was evidently raised up by Providence to forward his plans of discovery. His zeal and application are not to be accounted for, at such a time, without a reference to the secret influence of the Divine hand. He met obstacles, but he was not to be disheartened by obstacles. The God who led Cyrus and Alexander, inspired him with resolution to overcome every difficulty. The ambition of the pope, the thirst of discovery, the desire of possessing the riches of India by a new passage, all concurred to favor his designs. John II. inherited the zeal of his grand-uncle, prince Henry, with greater power. His ardor became so vehement, that the prosecution of this object occupied his thoughts by day, and bereaved him of sleep through the night. Surely this was the working of that Providence that banished sleep from the couch of Ahasuerus, to bring about his gracious purposes towards the house of Abraham.

During the same time, Columbus, by a peculiar Providence brought into Portugal, and enriched with all its nautical skill, was employed by Spain in a voyage of discovery ; and in quest of India by steering west, in the year 1492, discovered the West India Islands. In 1498, he discovered the

continent of America; and in the same year the Portuguese arrived at India by the passage of the Cape of Good Hope. "Thus," said Dr. Robertson, "during the course of the fifteenth century, mankind made greater progress in exploring the state of the habitable globe than in all the ages which had elapsed previous to that period." By such a train of evidently providential events, all the countries of North and South America, all the vast regions of the East Indies, now lie open, inviting the exertions of the friends of the Bible.

The rage of discovery continued to explore the globe, and Captain Cook, with other illustrious British seamen, have added largely to the territories that are destined to be conquered by the arms of Jesus. Many of the islands of the South Seas have already submitted, and vie with Britain herself in subjection to the gospel. The spirit of discovery still glows in the breasts both of navigators and travellers, and impels them to the most distant and dangerous undertakings. Why burns the soul of Captain Parry and his brave comrades amidst the ices of the polar circle? Who has implanted in modern travellers that restless desire of roaming over the world and of discovering its most barbarous tribes? Who supported the unconquerable soul of Mungo Park amidst the bereavements of society and all the dangers of a life among unknown barbarians? Who animates the hearts of

Major Laing and Captain Franklin? It is the secret influence of that decree of Providence, that revealed purpose of Jesus, which is pledged for the universal spread of the gospel. It is this that begets and supports these ardent hopes of discovery, both by sea and land. The love of glory, and the desire of a deathless name, may alone excite the individual; but, in the wisdom of God, this effects the Divine purposes. This rage for discovery will never cool till every island and nook of land on the globe shall be visited that is the receptacle of a human soul; for it is the decree of Heaven, that this gospel shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end be.

In accompanying the navigators in their discoveries, it is delightful to observe how miraculously they are often preserved from destruction. This moment they are in apparent safety, the next moment they are in the very jaws of death. They dash through with safety within almost an inch of the rock. This is the more surprising as the crews in general were wicked and abandoned men; and even in the science and humanity that graced the superiors, we look in vain for that knowledge of Jesus that would eagerly desire to communicate the way of life to benighted heathens. The discoverers were as much without God as the discovered. Yet the God who preserved Cyrus

and Alexander when they were doing his work, preserved the guilty mariners from shipwreck, when they were making a highway over the seas for the chariot of the gospel.

As we perceive the hand of Providence in pointing out the different countries of the world to the discovery of man from the beginning of the fifteenth century, in order to the spreading of the gospel, the same gradual preparation is traceable in the history of the world before the coming of Christ. The victories of Alexander the Great, and of the Romans, made known and united countries, not only formerly unconnected, but unknown. The greater part of the known world was subject to Rome, and the union among nations was never so entire, nor the intercourse so perfect, as within the bounds of this vast empire. The intention of all these mighty preparations was evidently to provide a theatre and an audience for the apostles of Christ. More magnificent preparations are now going forward, and the various tribes of men under the whole heaven must ere long hear the glad tidings of salvation. Scientific and mercantile pursuits will not cease to encourage discovery by sea and land; and fame or curiosity will not cease to call forth missionaries in their service, whose discoveries will be given over to Christianity, and who will roam about the globe as long as there is a

spirit on it inaccessible to the gospel of God our Saviour.

The next thing I shall mention as contributing in the ways of Providence towards facilitating the progress of the gospel over the world, is commerce. The intimate union of the nations of Europe under the Roman yoke, was very favorable to the exertions of commerce, though that empire never partook of the commercial character itself. But the breaking up of the social bonds, through the irruption of the northern barbarians, split Europe into petty kingdoms, and totally extinguished commerce. The usual intercourse between neighboring countries was not only discontinued, but unsocial laws and customs shut up every kingdom, and almost every baronial territory, from foreign ingress. The shipwrecked mariner became the slave of the lord of the soil on which he was cast. To remove from one province to another was subject to many inconveniences, and often subjected to slavery. In such a state, it is evident that commerce must have been very limited, if it was not entirely extinct.

Now, in perceiving the hand of Providence in the revival of commerce, and its importance towards the spreading of the gospel, we must reflect for a moment on the way in which it lends its aid. We may see at once that it is not only serviceable, but, without a miracle, absolutely necessary. Even

were all the islands of the sea, and every inhabited spot of earth discovered, we could not send them the gospel without commerce. All the revenues that could be afforded by the liberality of Christians would be utterly ineffectual, if the ships must be purchased and the seamen paid from the funds of missionary or Bible societies. Indeed, without commerce, although we had mountains of Bibles, and funds inexhaustible, there would not be practised mariners to be found. Government is aware that commerce is essential to train a body of seamen to be ready in case of war, and that all other resources would be unavailing without this. In like manner, commerce is necessary to convey the Bible to the nations of the earth. By the wise providence of God, the millions of capital employed in commerce, have covered the sea with ships for every part under heaven ; the missionary with his stores of Bibles is wafted to every clime, with little expense, or at no expense at all. Commerce encourages discovery, and keeps up an intercourse with the discovered countries, and the Bibles conveyed by it to the wretched inhabitants, will never sink one of its ships. Without commerce, Bible societies would be useless for distant countries, and of little use even with respect to those that are near. It is the intercourse of commerce that chiefly and expeditiously conveys the Scriptures through the internal parts of each country. Commerce is

to the Bible what the post-office establishment is to newspapers; it carries them free of expense, though appointed for another purpose. It is evident, then, that every new line of road, every mail coach that starts through a new district, every canal cut through the interior, is destined by God to lend its aid in the cheap and expeditious conveying of his word. Every improvement in navigation, everything that promotes intercourse upon land, facilitates the spreading of the gospel, and must be looked upon as a part of a providential plan. Steam-ships and railroads are a part of the Divine apparatus to carry the ordnance of Heaven to the field of battle. If genius succeeds in carrying us fifty miles an hour by atmospheric pressure, it will contribute to the closer union, the more intimate intercourse, and the more perfect cultivation of the human family, and we shall accept it as a gift of Heaven for the advancement of the progress of his gospel.

But it is not merely the revival and present extent of commerce we are here to admire in a providential view. The country that possesses the commerce of the world is also wonderfully providential. Why does Great Britain ride mistress of the seas? why does she engross the commerce of the world? why does she sweep the ocean from one pole to another? why can she block up her enemies in their harbors, and make them afraid to look out

of their own doors? Because Great Britain is the land of Bibles, and carries them to every port. She has been chosen by Providence as the herald of salvation, and there is no fear that she will lose her commerce as long as she is faithful to her trust. But let all the countries under British sway be open for missionaries; and let British commerce carry the heralds of salvation to every port which she visits; let not worldly policy discountenance attempts to evangelize the heathen under fears of the danger of interfering with the religion of the people. Let full liberty of operation be given to the servants of the Lord, and let them be protected in doing his work; let not idolatry be patronised; let not her murders be tolerated under pretence of liberty of conscience.

The hand of Providence is wonderfully manifested in the alteration of the situation of India within the last few years. Not long since, the abominations of Juggernaut were an English establishment, and the troops of a country calling itself Christian, attended the procession of his horrid car. The taxes of the idol were levied by British officers, and the expenses of the ceremonies were defrayed by legal funds. The providence of Jesus has put an end to this shameful practice. England no longer sanctions the religious murders of India. People in this country who are accustomed to speak of a Christian government, do not generally know, and will find it

difficult to believe, how hostile the rulers of India were to the evangelizing of India till a very late period.* Yet no heathen despot could have guarded against the introduction of missionaries with a greater jealousy. A quotation from the diary of Mrs. Judson, the celebrated American missionary in the Burmese empire, will prove this in a manner that must create abhorrence not only among Christians, but in every friend of civil and religious liberty. She writes so late as the year 1812. "The East India Company," says she, "are violently opposed to missionaries, and have barely given liberty to their own countrymen to settle as preachers. We have nothing to expect from man, and everything from God. I think I never felt more confidence in God to protect and direct this mission than this morning. If he has anything for us to do here, he will doubtless open a door for our entrance; and if not, he will send us to some other place." Well, were the men of God allowed to sit down in British India, to endeavor to bring poor heathens to the knowledge of Christ? No such thing; the good Christian rulers of that place would not suffer them to rest in the land; they are ordered back to America. "After they had been here," says the narrative, "about ten days, Messrs. Judson and

* It is an observation of Sir James Mackintosh, that every religion was tolerated in India, except Christianity.

Newel were summoned to Calcutta, and an order of the government was read to them, requiring them immediately to leave the country, and return to America. The government of India at that time were resolutely opposed to missions: their motives we need not now discuss." The zealous missionaries tried every resource to effect their purpose; but the rulers of India were inexorable; they would not allow any delay. "The government," says the narrative, "were offended by the stay of missionaries at Calcutta, supposing probably, that they intended to remain in Bengal." "They accordingly," says Mrs. Judson, "issued a most peremptory order for our being sent immediately on board one of the Honorable Company's vessels bound to England. A petty officer accompanied Messrs. Hill and Judson to their place of residence, and requested them not to leave it without permission." Thus were these men of God, who had gone out from America to publish salvation to sinners in India, watched and hunted like felons by the British Christian government of Bengal, so lately as the year 1812. But the hand of Providence is seen even in the attempt to shut out the gospel. The American missionaries were thus sent to the Burman empire, where the mission has succeeded, and is now going on with signal prosperity.

How soon the providential hand of Him who sits on the throne of David can open the door that has

been shut and bolted against him, may be seen in the removing of the restrictions of missionary efforts in India. "The charter of the East India Company," says the narrative, "which was renewed in 1813, was so altered in its passage through Parliament, by the zealous exertions of Wilberforce, Smith, Thornton, Fuller, and other friends of Christ in Great Britain, as to secure toleration for missionary efforts. The British possessions in the East were constituted an Episcopal see, and placed under the superintendence of a bishop and three archdeacons. The Rev. Doctor Middleton was the first bishop, and was succeeded by Bishop Heber, who has since died. It is just to say, that a great change of feeling has taken place among the officers of government, and the European residents in India. The fears concerning the effects of missionary operations have subsided, and they are now disposed to favor and promote them." The present bishop, the Rev. Dr. Wilson, so well known as a zealous friend of the gospel and promoter of the religious societies of London, is not likely to be less useful than his predecessors in advancing the cause of Christ in the regions of the East.

In the midst of so many miracles of Providence, let us also take a glance at the reason why the Reformation succeeded in England, and was extinguished in France and other parts of the con-

tinent, at first more fully enlightened than it. Why does the light of Divine truth blaze in Britain, while scarcely any is to be seen in Spain and Portugal? Because England, by its insular situation, is a fit station for the mart of evangelical light. Because Britain is the first of commercial nations, and therefore able to disseminate its Bibles over the world. Were Britain involved in Spanish popery, and Spain as fully enlightened as Britain, the commerce of the world would be of no advantage to the fulfilling of our Lord's prediction. If the continent had commerce, it would not employ it to carry Bibles; therefore God has committed to it that talent: if it had the light without commerce, it could not carry Bibles; therefore God has given the Reformation to England, while he has permitted the continent to lie under popish darkness, or to wanton in the false lights of infidelity and Neology.

But though Great Britain, from its insular situation, is naturally adapted to be the seat of commerce, we must not on that account consider its commercial greatness a matter of course. Let us look back for a moment on the history of commerce, and we will see that instead of being the foremost of the nations to embark in commerce, it was among the last. It was long before it availed itself of its peculiar advantages. The revival of commerce was owing to the Crusades, and by this

circumstance it first found a seat ameng the Italian states. What a wonderful Providence is this! Commerce was necessary to fulfil the prediction of Jesus, and carry the gospel into all nations: the God of Providence overruled these wild efforts of fanaticism, as the means of rekindling the spirit of commerce. Various circumstances in Providence led to the establishment of freedom in many commercial cities in Italy, Germany, and France. Towards the close of the twelfth century, the Hanseatic league was formed, the most powerful commercial confederacy known in History, including "eighty of the most considerable cities scattered through these extensive countries which stretch from the bottom of the Baltic to Cologne on the Rhine." From this period commerce continued to extend; but she sought a throne in many nations before she found one in Great Britain. The Italian states, the cities of the Hanseatic league, Portugal, Spain, all preceded Great Britain in commerce and discovery. The splitting of the kingdom into the Saxon heptarchy, the incursions of Danes and other northern pirates, the Norman conquest, the prosecution of the pretensions of the English kings to the throne of France, the wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, successively retarded the progress of commerce in England.

That Providence might make the transference

more visibly his own work, the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope, and the first influx of the riches of the East were given to Portugal, while the vast provinces of South America were lavished on Spain. In all the busy period of the sixteenth century, while commerce and discovery travelled with a quick pace, England had no name in either. Why did not things remain in this state? why has the wealth of India been transferred to Great Britain? Doubtless, that she may give the Bible to the hundred millions of idolaters that there own her sway. She has done something, and she is about to do more. If ever she loses India, it will be the forfeiture of her treachery to the God of Providence in withholding the Bible from her Indian subjects. The very same infidel and ignorant theories that are now employed to denounce the Reformation of Ireland as a crusade, were alleged to prohibit the interference of the missionary with the religion of the worshippers of Juggernaut. Politicians, secretly influenced by hostility to the gospel of God, and grounding on theory rather than on the knowledge of human nature, pretend to be frightened with every attempt to enlighten the world. It is dangerous, they tell us, to tamper with the religion of the people. But the experiment has been tried both in India and Ireland, and the speculations of theoretical politicians have

been put to shame. The Providence of the Most High has given independence to South America, and she now lies open to an invasion of Bibles. The time is at hand when the rulers of the world must open their dominions to the word of God, or be displaced from their trust. Britain! remember to what it is you owe your exalted rank among the nations of the earth! Who called Cyrus to Babylon, and gave him the sceptre of the world for delivering the captive Jews? Fulfil, then, my country! fulfil your honorable trust, and bid defiance to all nations. Give India, give Ireland the Bible; and frown on the threats of demagogues at home; disregard the combination of continental despots: the nation that fears Jehovah has nothing else to fear. England! if ever you lose India or Ireland, it will be by unfaithfulness to the God of the Bible.

To what is it owing that Great Britain is now in danger of losing Ireland? To her unfaithfulness in not evangelizing it. For many an age she has suffered this country to remain in ignorance, and still she hopes to retain it by soothing and assisting superstition. Let conscience be left free as air, but let not men be hired to uphold the empire of ignorance. Scriptural education was advancing, and had there been no interference on the part of government, in a short time, by the exertions of the London Hibernian Society, aided by the Christian

zeal of England, Scotland, and Ireland, every part of the country would have had the benefit of a Bible education. No clerical power could have kept the people from the schools in which the Bible was read and committed to memory, had not the funds afforded by government made it possible to have education without the Bible. The great evil of the national system of education appears not to lie in injuring the Protestants by excluding the Bible—this they have in their houses; the injury is to the Roman Catholics, who, by this contrivance, are kept from the Bible. But though Jesus has by his providence suffered the door to be shut for *a time*, he can open it when he pleases. And at all events, the present education will prepare the way for reading the Scriptures when the Lord's time shall come to put them into the hands of the people. The rebel who learns the manual exercise in order to fight against his sovereign, will be enabled to do him the more service when he returns to his allegiance.

How lately have we heard the groans of the disciples of Jesus in Jamaica! Their houses of worship have been pulled down, their property has been pillaged, and themselves thrown into prison or murdered! Jamaica now lies open to the labors of the missionary, and many brethren have entered the field which is ripe to harvest. The cruel, the worse than pagan slavery of the West Indies is now abolished, and the gospel can be preached

to the injured children of Ethiopia. It is the providential Lord of Heaven who sits on the throne of David that has removed the obstacles, and has opened the door.

The amazing number of institutions for propagating the light of Divine truth within the last half century, compared with all that ever was attempted in any other period of the world, is such as to preclude all possibility of doubt that the God of Providence is putting his engines in motion to give accomplishment to the prediction of Jesus. It was at all times the duty of Christians to make such attempts. Why were they neglected for so many ages? Why are they thought of now? Why are God's people of all denominations stirred up to seek the salvation of man? Why is this age distinguished for unparalleled efforts to rescue from darkness Jews and Papists, Mahometans and Pagans? Certainly because the Lord's time is come, when his house shall be built of all nations. Towards the close of the captivity of Judah, Daniel was stirred up to fast and pray for the deliverance of his people. And whenever the servants of God are generally excited to seek the accomplishment of his gracious promises, his providence declares that he is about to gratify their desire; hence, in rapid succession, missionary societies, Bible societies, education societies, in every part of the civilized world. Even in benighted Ireland, some parts of

the desert are beginning to blossom as the rose; some spots of the wilderness are becoming fruitful fields. The spreading zeal for extending the blessings of the Reformation is peculiarly providential. Even the most zealous friends of the gospel formerly neglected the conversion of Roman Catholics as a hopeless task. What has kindled such a flame of apostolic zeal in the present times? Does not Providence declare by this, that the period of the tenure of the man of sin is nearly at its close, and that he must shortly surrender his usurped dominion?

By these institutions, the gradual extinction of party spirit is most pleasingly exemplified, and gives the most promising pledge of success. Formerly, whatever zeal there might be for the salvation of sinners, zeal for its own peculiarities was the prominent feature of every sect; now, zeal for the gospel is evidently paramount; and without sacrificing or compromising the smallest particle of religious principle, all sects of the friends of Jesus can combine in forwarding the cause of the Bible. Without respect to the interest of particular denominations, Christians unite their efforts for the salvation of sinners.

Nor ought we, in enumerating providential circumstances, to overlook the critical time of the pacification of Europe. How opportunely did this take place to open the Continent to the operations of

the friends of the Bible! How many Bibles have since that been poured over the Continent, through the Bible Societies of this country! The Continental Society could not have existed without peace. Already it has achieved much good, and promises still more. If Providence gave peace to the Roman empire to make way for the apostles, so has he given peace to Europe to enable England to spread the gospel over the Continent.

I cannot close this tract without just noticing, that Dr. Doyle says that we do not owe to the Bible, without note or commentary, the modern system of metaphysics. No observation could be more unfortunate. Many of the subtilties of popery had their origin in the Aristotelian philosophy, and are swept away by true science. To the providence of the God of the Bible, for the support of the truths of the Bible against the absurd figments of popery, I do believe we owe the soundest system of metaphysics ever submitted to the world. To the illustrious Dr. Reid of Glasgow College, in the last century, we owe the overturning of that philosophical theory which took away the evidence of the testimony of our senses. Before his time the senses were looked upon by philosophers, as well as by priests, as arrant knaves, not to be credited without a voucher. Dr. Reid ascertained their laws, examined their nature, observed their operations, and estimated their evidence, better than any phi-

losopher that ever existed. He has established it as a first principle, that the testimony of the senses, in a sound and natural state, is the voice of Heaven; and has triumphantly answered all the objections that have been made to them, as fallacious. In doing this, he has laid a foundation for overturning transubstantiation—that disgrace of human understanding—that most absurd of all the absurdities of popery.

No lunatics have ever been so frantic as metaphysicians. They go like a pendulum, from side to side, to the utmost bounds of extravagance. When their folly ceases to amaze by its extravagance on the one side, they endeavor to effect their purpose by hastening to the opposite. This has brought the science into discredit. But as the faculties of man are the gift of God, whatever is known as self-evident truth, is to be considered as a Divine revelation, and ought, without scruple, to be employed against superstition and error, as far as its influence can extend. The speculations of many, under the name of metaphysics, are mere philosophical romances, that either take as self-evident truth that which is false, or deny first principles that are self-evident. Sober science may, without difficulty, discover the cheat on both sides, by appealing to the light that God has lodged in human understanding. All reasoning must rest on first principles that need no foreign proof.

I have now traced a chain of providential circumstances throughout a period of eighteen hundred years, all the links of which combine in the accomplishment of the prediction, Matt. xxiv. 14; and I hope my Christian readers are all prepared to join with me in the conclusion, THAT THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE IS THE GOD OF THE BIBLE!

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

DEMONSTRATED FROM

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

MANIFESTED

IN THE ATONEMENT,

IN A

LETTER TO MR. RICHARD CARLILE.

BY

ALEXANDER CARSON, LL.D.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."—JESUS.

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."—PAUL.

"Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word."—JESUS.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

If the truth of the Gospel is evident from a consideration of the attributes of God, manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a thing of the utmost importance. It places the evidence of Christianity upon ground higher than even Christians themselves have generally dared to rest it. It invests it not only with the highest kind of what has been called moral certainty, but ranks it among self-evident truths. Christianity stands upon prophecy, upon the most unimpeachable testimony, upon the most stupendous miracles. But, distinguished from every other truth not discoverable by the light of nature, it stands also on the ground of its own intrinsic evidence. It is at once a self-evident truth and a revelation. The very impossibility of its being discovered by the light of nature is self-evidence of its truth.

The truth of the Scriptures has often been proved from their internal, evidence, in the most triumphant manner. An examination of this kind will afford an accumulation of evidence, to which there will be no end; and will afford increased satisfaction in every step of the progress. This may be called a kind of self-evidence. But my argument is not of this kind. It respects solely the view of the character of God; and from the nature and harmony of the divine attributes, professes to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel. Without reference to any external source of evidence, I maintain that a true perception of the Gospel will afford self-evidence of its truth. There is not a demonstration in Euclid's Elements clearer to my mind, than the truth of the gospel, independently of all external proof. Christianity, as appears to me, claims attention, not only as resting on moral evidence—evidence that in all other things is accounted sufficient, though of a different kind from that on which the sciences rest; but also as resting on that kind of evidence that has always been accounted the highest—when the truth of the thing asserted is manifest in the very assertion.

In asserting that the truth of the Gospel is manifest from itself, I am borne out by the Scriptures themselves. It is called *light*, and Jesus Christ calls himself *the light* of the world. His appearing is predicted as the rising of the Sun of Right-

eousness; and the universal spreading of his gospel is represented under the figure of that great fountain of natural light diffusing his beams over every part of the earth. Now light necessarily proves itself, and needs nothing to manifest it. It serves to discover other objects of sight, but needs nothing to discover itself. The Apostle therefore says, whatever doth make manifest is light. Our Lord himself, though he appeals to his works as proof of his mission, yet declares the self-evidence of the truth to be the condemnation of unbelievers. "This is the condemnation," says he, "that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." It may be asked, if the Gospel is self-evident, why do not all men believe it? Jesus in the above passage supplies the answer. They shut their eyes against it, because they love darkness rather than light, their works being evil. The Apostle Paul also declares that if this Gospel be hid, it is hid to them only who are blinded by Satan. Were any man so constituted as to hate light, so as never to be induced to open his eyes, he might till his death remain in ignorance of the sun as being the fountain of light. A blind man has no self-evidence of the existence of light: he believes it on testimony. Man by nature is spiritually blind, and the only difference between a blind man and a spiritually blind sinner, is, that the former is unwil-

lingly blind, the latter willingly and wickedly. The sinner is blind because he hates the light. If, according to the supposition of an ancient philosopher, a number of men had been all their lives kept in a cavern, they could have no evidence, except from testimony, of the existence of the sun; but the moment of their coming into light, they would behold the sun, and could not but believe that he exists, and is what they perceive him to be. Just so with sinners and the light of the Gospel. They are all blinded by natural aversion to the truth; and though the light of the Sun of Righteousness shines around them with intense clearness, they do not discover it, because that darkness covers their eyes. The light shines in darkness, but the darkness comprehends or perceives it not. But the moment that God opens their eyes, they behold the light of the Gospel, and cannot but believe that it is real.

But this objection will not be made by any one acquainted with the history of theology or science. Popery stands on the ruins of self-evident and even necessary truth. Every Roman Catholic in the world must hold his religion by resisting the right of axioms. Ancient philosophy, from its very cradle, trampled on the light of nature, and founded some of its distinguishing principles on the ruins of common sense. The sceptical philosophy of Mr. Hume rested on a foundation self-evidently false. Such

known facts, then, ought to prevent any one from being surprised that the Gospel is self-evident, yet misunderstood and rejected by the bulk of the world.

That the Gospel is self-evident, is evident from the words of the commission to preach it over the world. He that believes it shall be saved, he that believes not shall be condemned. This makes it condemnation for every man to hear the Gospel and not believe it. Now it cannot be truly believed but upon evidence, nor can unbelief be criminal, if evidence is wanting. Suppose a man who had never heard of Jesus, comes into an assembly of Christians, and hears the Gospel for the first and last time, dying in unbelief before he leaves the house—is this man's unbelief condemnation? It is so, if the language of the commission is true. If so, there must be evidence of its own truth in the Gospel itself, for this man has no opportunity of consulting any other of all the evidences of Christianity. He cannot be justly condemned for not yielding to evidences altogether inaccessible to him. The testimony of the preacher is not a ground of evidence, for to a man unacquainted with the Gospel, it is nothing better than the testimony of a preacher of Mahometanism. How is such a man to judge between the testimony of him who preaches Paul's Gospel, and that of those who preach another Gospel? It must then be the evidence of the

truth contained in the Gospel itself that will be the ground of condemnation. If he has heard of the just God and the Saviour, of the union and harmony of justice and mercy in the salvation of sinners by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, he has heard a thing that never could have suggested itself to the human mind. Nothing but criminal blindness can prevent him from perceiving, in some measure, the evidence, importance, and glory of the truth. He will see that such a salvation, and nothing but such a salvation, is suitable to himself, and available for his redemption.

Indeed it is on this ground that the Gospel is generally received. Christians in general have received the truth, not from a long previous examination of evidences, but from the Scriptural declarations in which it is contained, either read or preached. When the mind is opened to perceive the true nature of the Gospel, it brings light and conviction with it. They are afterwards charmed, and edified, and confirmed in their most holy faith, by investigating, according to their opportunities, the various sources of the evidence of their religion. Even when men have been brought to a knowledge of the Gospel, after professedly searching for the pearl of great price, in the evidences of Christianity, their minds have been opened to perceive the evidence that it has in its own nature. As long as the mind is blind to this, con-

viction of the truth of Christianity, from other evidences, is not the faith of the Gospel. It is a belief that the thing believed is true, but as the thing revealed is not understood, it is not properly the belief of the thing itself. Many a learned and useful defence of the Gospel has come from the pen of those who do not understand it. Many a poor uneducated man knows almost nothing of the evidence of Christianity but what he finds in itself.

This subject peculiarly solicits the attention of ministers of the Gospel. The substance of my view is, that the Gospel is a manifestation of the Divine character, and that in that character there is self-evidence of its truth. If so the Gospel is never preached, except the character of God, as the just God and the Saviour, is exhibited. To omit noticing that pious rant, that frothy declamation, that extravagant fanaticism, and all those effusions of feeling which are poured from the pulpit under the name of the Gospel; many discourses may be both true and important, which afford not a sinner any view that will enlighten him to salvation. He who preaches the Gospel must exhibit the Saviour as a divine personage, making full atonement for sin. Without showing the character of Jesus, to speak of salvation by him in the most correct and decided terms, fails of fully preaching the Gospel. To men who do not know Jesus as a divine personage, a call to believe in him, will not give a suf-

ficient ground of hope. It is necessary to show them who this Jesus is. Without this, the phrase, believe in Jesus, will no more enlighten than the phrase, believe in Mahomet. There is no charm in the name. It is the character of him who is named the Lord Jesus, that makes his name the ground of the hope of his people. In preaching the Gospel, therefore, the preacher ought to be careful, at one time or other, to state the ground of the hope of a sinner, in such a way as, by showing the Divine character, there may be in his doctrine evidence of its own truth.

It is not intended by this that nothing but the Gospel, in the strict sense, should be the subject of discourse. In most men there is an unhappy propensity to extremes; and when an error is seen on one side, the usual way taken to avoid it, is to run as far as possible to the other. Disgusted with the silly or dangerous substitutions for the Gospel that are often found in the pulpit, some can bear nothing but what they call a simple statement of the truth. Everything else is unnecessary, and even to reason from the truth, or remonstrate with sinners, is in their estimation, merely human. Such persons have got only a flying view of truth. They have indeed discerned that some people have decked her with ornaments which are not natural, but much of her native dress they have not beheld. Instead of allowing her to sit for

her picture, they have dismissed her with a mere glance, and represent her from their imagination. To teach and to preach, though they belong to the same office, are very different things. Every Scriptural truth is to have its place, and every argument and motive that can affect the human mind, are to be employed by the Christian teacher. Reason and Scriptural example have abundantly consecrated this procedure. Nothing but ignorance and fanaticism can look out for objections. But in all the diversified topics of public religious instruction, the Gospel itself ought ever to be remembered, both with a view to the salvation of sinners, and the edification of those who have already believed.

This view of the gospel, however, peculiarly encourages Christians to unremitting and illimitable study of the truth itself. As it is the knowledge of the Divine character, it is not a thing to be fully learned at once, so as to be incapable of increase. Though the least degree of it is salvation, yet the progress to be made from the first believing is altogether incalculable. Were an ignorant savage to die the moment after he believes the truth, he has that knowledge which is connected with salvation; yet how little does he know! Ignorant of everything in the book of God, but the saving truth itself, and knowing that truth in a very small measure, yet he knows something of

the way of coming before God, with acceptance through the great atonement. He has a glimpse of that plan of salvation that represents God as just, yet a Saviour. His hope towards God is not from his own righteousness, but through our Lord Jesus Christ. But what a difference between his knowledge of the Divine character, and that of an Apostle!

If there is a progress in the Christian's knowledge of the Gospel itself, every step in that progress, he must get rid of a proportional degree of ignorance and error. This proves, then, that perfect uniformity of view, much less of language, even with respect to the gospel itself, is not to be expected among Christians. According to their respective progress, there will be a difference, whether expressed or not. As far as Christians are taught of God they will agree. But even in the Gospel they are not all equally taught of God. And even in the things in which they are taught of God, there is a coloring taken from human eaching, and the language adopted from a sect or peculiar circumstances, may continue to be used when the mind is more correctly taught by the Holy Spirit. Nothing, then, is farther from my wish than to be understood as dooming to damnation all who are not prepared to adopt the whole of my views on this subject; that arrogance that makes a god and a savior of its

clear views, that confines salvation to a mode of expressing faith, that looks with contempt on the body of Christians, as a sort of pious infidels, that seems to delight in the fewness of the saved, finds no sanction from the Scriptures, and originates in the pride of human nature, not in godly zeal for the truth. When a man seems anxious to find out something in the faith of professing Christians at which to cavil, when he strains their language to condemn them, there is no ground to suppose that he is influenced by love. Keeping clear, therefore, of a censorious spirit, I would wish to impress Christians with the importance of my views of the subject. They have no sectarian tendency, but address themselves to the candor of all denominations of Christians. The strength, the beauty, the glory of Christianity will appear in proportion as it is viewed in this light.

If this is a valid mode of defending the Gospel, it is of peculiar importance at the present moment, in the controversies of Protestants with the Church of Rome. To show the necessity of the authority and infallibility of their Church, Roman Catholics cast discredit on the general evidence of the Scriptures, and undervalue the internal marks of truth. They pretend that there is no solid reason for receiving them as the word of God, except the authority of the Church. This is the invariable way in which they proceed in

their reasonings with Protestants, from the most learned of them to the most illiterate. They attempt to throw everything loose, in order to convince their antagonists that the authority of an infallible living tribunal is indispensable. Protestants who are not aware of the artifice, are apt to think that Roman Catholics are generally infidels, whereas in truth, this is only a stratagem of war, which they have learned not from the deists but from the priests. They receive the Scriptures as they do every part of their system, not from their proper evidence, but on the words of their clergy. By this mode of defence, they often confound their adversary, or evade his attacks. The most illiterate and weak person may bring forward this allegation, but the most sensible Protestant may not at all times be able to avail himself of all the sources that supply arguments for the authenticity of the Scriptures. Now in this situation the ground of defence taken in this tract is capable of being understood by Christians in general, and of being instantly and effectually applied on any emergency. The most illiterate Christian may successfully contend against the most learned opposer, in proving the truths of the Gospel from its own peculiar nature. It makes a discovery of God that proves it to come from God. The divine glory so shines on the face of Jesus Christ, as to prove him to be the Sun of Righteousness.

LETTER

TO

MR. RICHARD CARLILE.

Sir,

Your late conspicuous opposition to the Scriptures, has induced me to suggest to you a few thoughts on the evidence of the Gospel. Though I consider you a most determined enemy to Jesus my Lord, my hope, and my glory, you shall from me meet with none of that illiberal abuse, with which you are sometimes treated: I view you on the verge of eternal misery, and would gladly be the means of showing you the refuge of the guilty. Jesus died for his enemies, and Richard Carlile cannot be more hostile to the doctrine of the cross than was Saul of Tarsus. Jesus has the hearts of all men in his hands; and should he open your eyes, your rebellion would be instantly subdued, and instead of reviling his word, your language would be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It could not then serve my purpose to undervalue your understanding, or endeavor to bring your motives into suspicion. Should you even die in blaspheming the truth, a Christian has no disposi-

tion to revile you. From my soul I pity the man who loses both worlds by his error.

Permit me then, sir, to bespeak your candid attention to what I shall submit. You must grant that to determine correctly on this subject, is a matter of the utmost importance. If the Gospel is true, eternal damnation is the inevitable doom of all who believe it not. It is not then the part of a rational man to neglect to examine its pretensions, or to reject it on slight consideration. To enter on the investigation of the subject, determined to oppose, manifests the highest temerity. Yet, sir, permit me to observe, that in the writings of all the infidels with which I am acquainted, there is a total want of candid discussion. Their rancorous hatred of the God of the Scriptures, urges them to endeavor to prove them untrue.

Yet there is a timid acquiescence in the truth of Christianity as little to be approved. Many declaimers against infidelity cry out, "Why rob us of our pleasing hopes, even though vain? Why awake us from our dreams of future felicity? Let us enjoy our consoling delusions. It is cruel to deprive us of the only alleviation of human misery." This is not the language of any man who understands the evidence of the Gospel: it is not the language of reason. The belief of imposture can never be useful: to expose imposture cannot be criminal. If the Scriptures are a forgery, let them by candid

reasoning be proved to be such. The God of truth cannot need the assistance of lies in the management of his empire.

It is not my intention to undertake a defence of Christianity from all the sources of its evidences. No truth ever communicated to the world recommends itself by such a variety of means of proof. Each of these is worthy of full exhibition by those who have leisure for the task. But of all proofs the most satisfactory to a Christian are found in the Scriptures themselves. These are open to the inspection of all, and level to the meanest capacity. I shall not, however, attempt to exhibit the general evidence that appears in the Scriptures, attesting their Divine original. Even this branch of the subject would require volumes to do it justice. I shall confine myself to a single point. I undertake to prove the gospel to be true from its own nature. I maintain that the way of salvation which it proclaims, gives such a character of God, as to demonstrate its own truth; and that, were it to be found in an island, without any other testimony, it is entitled to acceptance with the fullest confidence. Those who should reject it, even in these circumstances, would reject it to their own just condemnation. No man who candidly examines the witness now at the bar, and discerns the import of his testimony, can withhold his conviction, that said

witness is acquainted with the true God, and commissioned to declare him to the world.

All the attributes of the Divine character are displayed in the Scriptures in a manner infinitely more glorious than the representations of them by the wisest of the human race. Granting that the ancient philosophers had some glimmerings of the unity, power, and immensity of God, they never gave the slightest hint for the illustration of those Divine attributes which most concern the happiness of man. The God that philosophy now boasts, has been principally stolen from the Scriptures. But we need not rest anything on what, it appears from their writings, philosophers did not know: we are warranted in asserting, that the Scriptures give views of the Divine character, perfectly rational, yet utterly unattainable from a view of the works of creation. Not only were some parts of the Divine character previously unknown; they are still to be seen in no other light than that of the Gospel. On the knowledge of these attributes depends the happiness of man. I shall begin with justice.

JUSTICE.

The infinite justice of God is to be seen in no other view than in the redemption of sinners through the atonement. No other plan of salvation has ever attempted to show God to be perfectly just. Every system, so far as it admits

guilt in men, must view God as deficient in justice, if he saves them. Now, if all the human race are finally to be happy without atonement to justice, God must be unjust in proportion to the aggregate amount of human guilt. Do you believe yourself to be in any measure guilty before God? How do you expect to free yourself from your guilt? Do you believe that the good you have done will compensate for the evil? Granting that your whole life had been a course of the highest virtue, with a single slight exception, all your goodness could not make amends for that single exception. I do not now speak from the authority of the Scriptures; I speak from reason. Is not the author of your existence entitled to your perfect obedience? Can you do more than your duty? When you have done all, are you not an unprofitable servant? The best actions have nothing to spare for the covering of the sin. Would this pay a debt to any earthly creditor? Should any one produce to you nine good shillings with one bad one, would you accept it in payment for ten shillings? Should this person urge that as there were so many good shillings, and but a single bad one, you ought to receive the latter for the sake of the former, would you not think him either a knave or a fool? And will you venture to meet God on similar ground? You hope to escape punishment though you are not sinless; your God

then is unjust. But, perhaps you will say, that as God is merciful as well as just, mercy will temper justice, and make it abate something of its demands. Granting for a moment that this is the case, I say again, your God is unjust. So far as his mercy bears down his justice, there is an inconsistency and opposition in his attributes, and the former robs the latter of its right. Your God is at war with himself, and the quarrel among his attributes can be settled only by compromise. Will you say that temporary punishment on yourself, either here or hereafter, will atone for your guilt? Where do you learn this? Is it a self-evident truth? But granting it to be true, if your God exacts full punishment from all, he is a God without mercy. The God of the Scriptures is the only God who is perfectly just, while he has mercy upon sinners. Now, sir, I entreat you to consider how illustriously justice shines in the salvation of guilty men through the atonement made by the blood of Jesus Christ. Every scheme of salvation devised by human wisdom leaves the sinner in arrear to justice. The claims of this Divine attribute are never perfectly respected. Here is a plan of salvation that gives infinite justice all its own. Instead of derogating from justice, the redemption of sinners by Christ has magnified the law and made it honorable. The eternal damnation of all mankind would not have done such honor to the law of

God, nor have rendered his justice so illustrious. In the atonement of Christ justice has a full compensation, which it never could have had in the punishment of the sinner himself. They who shall suffer for their sins, shall never have paid off the debt. What can be more honorable to the law of God than that nothing less than the blood of his own Son could free from the wrath due to the breach of it? The infinitely worthy Sacrifice gave justice a full remuneration. Here is justice in perfection. What a solid ground of confidence does this give to a Christian! He depends not more on mercy than on justice and truth. The Scriptures declare that God *is faithful* and *just* to forgive the sins of believers. The righteousness of a Christian is better than that of the highest angel in heaven. It is the righteousness of the Son of God. Clear views of the Divine character give a sinner the utmost confidence in the presence of God. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God himself who clears them. Who is he that condemneth? Christ hath died. His blood takes away all the guilt of all who believe in him. The most hardened enemy of God and his people will not be able to allege in the day of judgment, that in the salvation of sinners, God has remitted a tittle of his justice. There will not be found a spot on the whole ransomed of the Lord. So far from tarnishing justice, the plan of

salvation through Jesus Christ, was necessary for the perfect manifestation of this attribute. In no other way could the infinitude of justice have been seen. It is the highest practical exhibition that infinite power could possibly give of infinite justice. Had sin never existed, Divine justice would have wanted its most perfect manifestation. In vain should we turn our eyes to the heavens and the earth for the discovery of this attribute. In vain should we search for it in the book of Providence, that records the acts of God's government of the world. Some twinklings of it may be seen, but they are scarcely visible from the glare of human crime. Even in hell itself justice shines not with such lustre, as in the atonement of sin by the blood of a Divine Personage.

Now, sir, you say that the Scriptures are a forgery. Here is a Divine attribute which they display in perfection, which never was discovered by any of the human race. Here is a Divine attribute, which no other scheme of salvation but that taught in the Scriptures can represent infinite perfection. Will you say, that a number of illiterate fishermen have discovered that, which from the foundation of the world has lain hid from the wisest of the children of men? Nay, to this hour it lies hid from the wisest of men, who through the pride of their wisdom will not submit to the wisdom of God. This discovery is still un-

known to multitudes who have in their hands the volumes that contain it. Not only infidels, but the great body of those who call themselves Christians, still restrict the Divine justice, and make the salvation of sinners the result of the victory of mercy. What then should bring to the minds of the Apostles a view of justice so sublime, so perfect, so astonishing, so far from the common way of thinking? What should lead them to discover what the wilful blindness of others will not suffer them to perceive, even when discovered? If all men but the Apostles, and those who receive their testimony, consider justice as standing in the way of the salvation of the guilty, and find it necessary to limit and mitigate this Divine attribute, before they can indulge hope before God, it is demonstrably certain that this view never was orginally suggested by man. Even granting that this view of the Divine justice is false, and that the philosophical or common view of that attribute is just, I maintain, that this a more sublime conception than the others, and if God's justice were such, he would be more perfect and glorious than he is without it. If the imperfectly just God be the true God, here is a theory of Divine justice that could render God infinitely more perfect than he is. Here is a plan that removes all the limitations of this attribute. But that cannot possibly be a true view of a Divine attribute, that repre-

sents it as capable of additional perfection. Shall it be possible to conceive a view of justice more excellent than that which belongs to the true God? The God of the Scriptures is so just that no sin ever will be committed without being visited with adequate punishment; that neither angel nor man shall ever dwell in his presence tarnished with the slightest impurity. If your God be the true God, he is much inferior to this, for if he suffers the world to escape punishment, he is obliged to lay aside justice, and become like the gods of Epicurus. The justice of the God of the Scriptures is vindicated by the blood of a Divine Person: the justice of your God is affronted without receiving any compensation. Can there be a question which of these is the true God? Here is justice in perfection: here is justice utterly beyond human invention: here is justice essentially different from the natural views of that Divine attribute entertained by savage and sage: here is a just God, though a Saviour of men. Sir, it is not more clear to me that there is a God, than that this is the true God. It is as clear as the light of heaven, that this character of God has come from himself. It would be more reasonable to ascribe the Newtonian philosophy to an idiot, than the origin of this conception to the human mind.

MERCY.

Let us next attend to mercy. However fond men may be of giving this attribute a prominent place in the Divine character, yet no human scheme of salvation has ever admitted it in a perfect degree. Men in general have no more idea of infinite mercy in God, than they have of infinite justice. They consider the salvation of sinners as owing neither to justice nor mercy in perfection and in harmony, but to the claims of both as mitigated by opposition. A salvation wholly of justice they fear, a salvation wholly of mercy they disdain. But the salvation of the gospel is of infinite mercy as well as of infinite justice. The mercy of God is unmixed mercy. The Scriptures declare salvation wholly of grace, without works of any kind or in any degree, as necessary for its reception. It is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. Since the foundation of the world, no man untaught by God ever looked for salvation in this way. Human wisdom in the learned and in the ignorant, in the civilized and in the barbarous, invariably expects that salvation will not be given without something on the part of the sinner himself to merit such a favor. The grace of God is not considered to consist in giving for nothing, but in giving at an undervalue. The great blessing of pardon is given for something done by the sinner, which in itself is not of adequate value.

Men, according to their view of their own character, vary in the degree of mercy and of merit, thought requisite to their salvation. But without some degree of merit to recommend him, no man will venture his trust on mercy. The most abandoned profligate on the street, reeling and foaming out blasphemy, must be saved by some kind of goodness in himself as well as mercy in God. On the very gallows he has some fancied merit to avert the Divine vengeance due to a life of rapine and murder. Unless he has believed God's testimony about his Son, he dare no more trust wholly to mercy than to unmixed justice. Now, sir, were the Gospel a forgery, would not the mercy of God be represented in it agreeably to the common views of that attribute? I hold it to be a self-evident truth, that if the mercy of God in the Scriptures is of a peculiar kind, that never suggested itself to the mind of man in any age or country, it cannot be looked upon as an invention of man. But it is not only mercy of a peculiar kind, it is the only kind of mercy that is worthy of God. It is pure mercy. A Divine attribute must be without alloy. Here then, sir, is a thing the most wonderful. Have unlettered impostors brought to view a Divine attribute, of the true nature of which all men in all ages have been ignorant?—an attribute that all men speak of, and to discover the true nature of which is every man's greatest interest. For though

this view of the Divine character was discovered by none of the human race, yet when perceived it recommends itself as perfect wisdom. When the eye of reason perceives it, conviction is absolutely irresistible. It is impossible to perceive God without knowing that he is God. Men who have never seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, may be imposed on with false gods; but, after they have seen the true God, the infinite glory of his perfections intuitively convinces them of its existence. The King of heaven has only to show himself to men, to thwart the pretensions of all usurpers. Yes, if Mr. Richard Carlile perceived the glory of the character which God has revealed of himself, he would admire and love the God that now he hates. He would confess that he never knew God before. He would count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. If he will not perceive this glory, it must be owing to the shutting of his eyes against the light. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not: lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." If he does not discern Christ's doctrine, it is because he cannot bear to hear it with a proper mind.

The mercy of God in the Scriptures is not only pure, it is also perfect. It extends to the chief of

sinners. It receives at the last moment the most hateful of his enemies, through the belief of the truth. The thief on the cross found mercy on the very brink of eternity. Saul of Tarsus, the greatest enemy of Jesus, was delivered by this mercy, at a time when, with a heart full of enmity, he was hastening to destroy the disciples. The hands of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost were reeking with blood through which they found mercy. These facts, while they call on the chief of sinners to believe in Jesus for salvation, serve to distinguish the Divine mercy from all the views of it ever suggested or entertained by the wisdom of man. Instead of owing its origin to the contrivance of man, human wisdom has ever been ashamed of this view of the Divine mercy. The illustrious facts above cited, are by many professed Christians kept in the background, or represented as a sort of anomaly in the Divine conduct. Men dread the scowl of philosophy, and are apprehensive lest such representations of mercy should give encouragement to sin. So opposed are we naturally to this view of the Divine character, that men use the utmost ingenuity to reconcile the Scriptures to human merit. They either give no encouragement to great sinners to turn to God through the belief of the truth, or they speak on this subject with a faltering voice. When a man is on the brink of eternity, they are indeed unwill-

ing to give him up to despair; yet they are afraid to give him hope through mercy, if he has been a very great sinner, lest they should endanger the interests of morality, and encourage others to continue in sin. Now, if the wisdom of man universally puts limits to the Divine mercy, the view of God's character that represents this attribute as perfect, cannot be from man.

But Divine mercy is not only perfect, it is also sovereign. It not only extends to the chief of sinners, but from among sinners, it takes one and leaves another, without any other reason than the will of God. Nay, it often selects the one that human mercy would overlook, and overlooks the one that human mercy would select. It chose persecuting Saul, and overlooked the rich young man who professed to come for instruction. It saved many of the publicans and sinners, while it overlooked many who boasted of their religious attainments. Now this is mercy truly sovereign, and mercy which no man will ever cordially admit, whose high thoughts are not brought down by the word and Spirit of God. Nothing is more offensive to the world than this view of the Divine character. It is well known, that many who acknowledge this as a religious sentiment, are found to revolt at it in heart. Men will make God as accountable to them for the exercise of his mercy, as they are accountable to him in the exercise of his justice. They will

not allow him to condemn or pardon the guilty as he pleases. He is not permitted to select a vile sinner, nor is he allowed to condemn those of a moderate character. Men therefore do not make God perfectly sovereign, therefore they do not make him truly God. If all men are guilty and worthy of punishment, which most who are called Christians admit, a sovereign God may punish all. If his mercy cannot save one, and pass by another, he is no sovereign. Here then is an attribute of God necessary to the Divine perfection, which human wisdom, so far from discovering, cannot admit. Shall we say that it was the invention of men?

But, granting that the Apostles were capable of such a forgery, would impostors forge a character of their God, which they must know would be displeasing to the world? What object could impostors have but to advance their temporal interests by gaining disciples? How could they expect to do this by presenting to them a God whom they hate? Such is our natural opposition to this attribute of God, that many deny it as it respects men, who admit it as it respects angels. They admit that the fallen angels are left in misery without mercy; and that, without any superior claims to regard, God sent his Son to redeem men. They will not allow God to choose among sinners, though they grant that he chose men rather than angels.

Indeed, I am sensible, that, to many called Christians, this whole view of mercy will be as disagreeable as your infidelity, and that your God will be more popular than mine. Were my object to please men, I would represent God as extending mercy to all that deserve mercy, and would scarcely pronounce the damnation even of the infidel. Since, then, the sovereignty of God is displeasing to the world, I conclude, as from an axiom, that it is not an invention of impostors; and, since it is necessary to the perfection of the Divine character, the book that discovers it must be a revelation from God.

I entreat you also, sir, to consider the peculiar aspect of this sovereign mercy. There is a weak and wicked partiality which the gods of all nations are supposed to have for their favorite countries. This partiality the Jews supposed that the God of Israel had for them. In this confidence, they considered themselves safe in doing the sins for which they knew the other nations of the world would be punished. This sort of partiality many think that God will have towards the professors of Christianity, while he will more rigorously look to the conduct of infidels. While they drink, and swear, and lie, and cheat, without any dread of the Divine displeasure, they see the wrath of God coming on Mr. Carlile. Indeed, there is a sectarian god, who winks at the sins of zealots of a

favorite party; but this is not the sovereignly merciful Lord God of the Scriptures: it is an idol of man's own creation, and the damnation of its deluded votaries is expressly declared by the true God. One of his ambassadors replies to them at large, in the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans—"And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them that do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" Rom. ii. 3. Though the God of the Scriptures selects one sinner as an object of mercy, and leaves another, not more criminal, to perish, he declares that there is no respect of persons with him. Rom. ii. 11. God's free mercy leads him to choose a sinner, without respect to his previous character; and his sovereign mercy to choose one rather than another: but neither the freedom nor sovereignty of mercy will cover any persisting in sin. All who receive this free sovereign mercy are taught to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 12—15. All then who encourage themselves in sin, from a hope of the Divine partiality in their favor, prove themselves ignorant of the true nature of God's sover-

eign mercy, and discover themselves to be mere hypocrites. The same gospel that reveals mercy, free sovereign mercy, reveals the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Now, sir, if all men naturally view themselves as so entitled to the favor of their gods, that they may safely do what is condemnation to others, is it not self-evident, that, had the apostles been impostors, they would have given the same view of their God? While he would have frowned on the crimes of others, he would have looked with an indulgent eye on the vices of his friends. All people accommodate the character of their gods to their own wants. The character given of God in the Scriptures has been altered to make it suitable to the professors of Christianity. Does not this incontestably prove, that the Scriptures were not made by man? Had they been an imposture of man, their God would have been like the gods of human creation.

WISDOM.

The wisdom of God is the next of his attributes, to which I take the liberty of calling your attention. This appears in a blaze of light in the harmonizing of attributes necessary to the Divine perfection, yet by all men, untaught by the Scriptures, thought irreconcilable. The plan of salva-

tion by Jesus Christ gives scope for the perfect operation of both justice and mercy, attributes which no other scheme of salvation can harmonize. Their claims are in themselves opposite, and, except on the gospel plan, really irreconcilable. If salvation is by perfect justice, how can it be in any measure by mercy? If it is altogether of mercy, how can it be in any measure by justice? Especially how can it be of infinite justice and of infinite mercy? If justice has all its own, how can mercy give all? If mercy gives all, how can justice receive its due? What mercy is there in cancelling debts that are fully paid? What justice can there be in free pardon? This is a question the solution of which is easy to the Christian, but by all others will remain unsolved for ever. The salvation of the believer is perfect justice, because his sin is fully punished in Christ, infinitely worthy as a Divine person: it is perfect mercy, because that punishment was suffered, not by the sinner himself, but by his Divine Substitute, sovereignly appointed. It is thus that the Scriptures speak of the believer as both justified and pardoned—words, in themselves, irreconcilable in any other way. To justify, is to acquit, as being free from guilt: to pardon, is to freely forgive the person proved to be guilty. Believers are in different respects both guilty and innocent, pardoned and clear. They are cleared of all sin, because their

Substitute hath taken it away: yet this is, in another light, pardon, because the Substitute was a Divine person, freely given for sinners. Here is wisdom truly divine. It is not indeed the wisdom of this world; it is not like the speculations of philosophy: but to all whose eyes are not shut against it, through their enmity to God, there is an overwhelming glory in it that delights and amazes the soul. The more clearly it is understood, the more it astonishes. It commands the admiration of angels, though it is the scorn of the perverted intellect of rebellious men. Read all the treatises of all the wise men who have written on the Being and Attributes of God. Do you find anything in their views of Divine wisdom like this? Which of them has a God perfectly just, and perfectly merciful? Could the intellect of an angel suggest any other way of harmonizing these attributes? You say the Gospel is an imposture. What! impostors forge such a God as this! Tell me that the heavens and the earth are not the work of God, but a forgery of some impostors. There is wisdom in the formation of the heavens and the earth, but in all the works of heaven and earth, there is not such wisdom as is displayed in that glorious plan of salvation that harmonizes infinite justice with infinite mercy.

Human wisdom has never even attempted to reconcile the attributes. Its only aim is to produce

hope, and to promote virtue, by modifying and opposing them. Mercy obliges justice to wink at the salvation of the imperfectly virtuous, and justice forbids mercy to stretch out her hand to the utterly vicious. Thus they continually oppose each other. Mercy, indeed, must have precedency, and the claims of justice on many urgent occasions are thwarted. The glory of the Divine character, instead of being made to consist in the perfection and harmony of God's attributes, is made to consist in the victory of mercy in a struggle with justice. This is the god of the savage and of the sage, of the virtuous and the vicious. This is the god of the wisdom of this world. But the Scriptures give us a God free of these imperfections. If there is a God, this is the true God.

The wisdom of God shines also in a wonderful manner in the mercy of the atonement. The exercise of mercy, as a human attribute, always, in some measure, gives encouragement to trespass. In proportion as there is a facility of obtaining mercy, will men be emboldened to violate law. Valuable as this prerogative is in our Sovereign, it is necessarily accompanied with this disadvantage. Accordingly, the more effectually to prevent forgery, there have been few instances of the pardon of this crime. I believe the highest interest has failed in procuring it from a very merciful king. Men naturally entertain the same views of the Di-

vine mercy, and in proportion as they think God to be merciful, have they hopes of committing sin with impunity. The most wicked men accordingly shelter themselves under the Divine mercy, even while they continue in wickedness. *God is merciful*, is the refuge of the bulk of mankind, and their encouragement to disobey the God of mercy. That this is also the opinion of many of the advocates of Christianity, with regard to the tendency of Divine mercy, is clear, from their efforts to guard, and limit it. They do not like to represent it with a very favorable aspect to the chief of sinners, nor are they fond of making it hang over the pillow of aged sinners. If the thief on the cross found mercy, the Saviour was then personally present, and the peculiar circumstances of that case can never again occur.* They fear lest such views

* Some writers, whose general views of the Divine character are sound and strong, have inadvertently and inconsistently fallen into the use of this exceptionable phrascology, from a mistaken desire of vindicating the gospel against abuse. A little reflection on the Scriptural declarations on this point, ought, I think, to convince such persons that such limitations tarnish the glory of the Gospel, destroy its grace, and drive to despair thousands to whom the word of God exhibits a free salvation. Surely no sinner was ever saved in any other way than the thief on the cross, and the persecuting Saul of Tarsus. The latter declares himself to be an instance of infinite mercy, not designed to be solitary, an example to give confidence to the most guilty, who in all future time should believe in Jesus. While, therefore, I am very far from denouncing as enemies of the Gospel, all such

of mercy should encourage others to sin, with a prospect of pardon in their last moments. And, with their views of mercy, they are right in their conclusions. If Divine mercy were like human mercy, all those dreaded consequences would flow from it. Their error lies in their views of the Divine mercy. Human mercy necessarily encourages to transgress; but the mercy revealed in the atonement is the strongest guard against sin. No man who really understands the mercy of God discovered in the salvation of Jesus Christ can live in sin. Though there is a free pardon to the sinner, this cost nothing less than the life of the Son of God. If sin is such a thing that it could not be forgiven without the punishment of a Divine person, it is demonstrably evident that it is most hateful to God; and that any person who loves it, and continues in it, cannot escape the Divine wrath. If God spared not his own Son, when he stood in the room of sinners, shall any man expect to commit sin with impunity? Every man who believes that Jesus died by sin, considers himself as having died with him; and having this dreadful lesson before his eyes, he is effectually deterred from living in sin. In this view, sin appears no light matter. If any man professing to be saved by the

as have been led to the adoption of such language, I cannot but press on all Christians the great importance of accurate views of this subject.

mercy of God through Jesus Christ, encourages himself to sin, with the hopes of impunity, he proves that he understands not this divine attribute, and that he has no part in the salvation of the Gospel. How can they who have died by sin, live any longer therein? Is it possible that any man should perceive the mercy of God in the gift of his Son, and his infinite hatred of sin, yet continue in that, on account of which the Father punished his Son without mercy? If Jesus drank the cup to the dregs, shall the hypocrite be suffered to escape? Men, therefore, who fear the consequences of exhibiting Divine mercy in all its freedom and fullness, err through not knowing the Scriptures, and by confounding the mercy of man with the mercy of God. When the king pardons a guilty man, justice bleeds; but when God pardons a sinner, justice has all its own. The broken law is more honored in the atonement made by the Divine Substitute, than in the punishment of the transgressor himself. No king could safely imitate the Divine mercy. Were he to save enormously guilty criminals, the common sense of mankind would revolt, the authority of law would be disrespected, and the total subversion of manners would follow. But God pardons the murderers of his own Son, without the slighest imputation on his justice, without injury to his law, without encouragement to transgression. Nay, God's hatred of the sin of

the murderers of his Son, is more seen in the death of that Son for such sinners, than in the punishment of such of these murderers as are now in hell. Were a judge to free an insolvent debtor, his mercy would be unjust; but were he to free him by paying his debt, mercy and justice meet. If among a number of housebreakers there were one who, at the hazard of his life, had prevented his associates from murdering a family, and another who exerted every effort for their destruction, the common sense of mankind would be shocked, should a king pardon the latter and suffer the former to perish for his crime. This would indeed be a monstrously bad action, and calculated by its example to endanger society. But God might save the guiltier of the two, and suffer the less guilty to die in his sins, without the slightest imputation on the tendency of his mercy. They are both guilty, therefore both may justly suffer, in proportion to their guilt. Should Divine mercy choose to snatch the guiltier from destruction, the blood of the Son of God has sufficiently avenged justice.

Now, sir, as human mercy necessarily encourages crime, as all men naturally entertain the same views of the Divine mercy, would not every religious system of human invention give the same representation of this attribute, and guard accordingly against its supposed tendency? Has not this actually been done even by the advocates of

Christianity? Were the gospel a device of man, its mercy would be the mercy of man. Is not this an axiom? But as the mercy revealed in the atonement, is not only of a peculiar kind, supposed by those who do not understand it to give encouragement to sinners, but is in reality the strongest guard against it, shall we suppose that this is the invention of imposture? Here is amazing wisdom. Mercy to the chief of sinners, mercy at the last breath of life, yet mercy that effectually induces all who receive it to forsake sin! Shall this wisdom be ascribed to men totally unacquainted with philosophical speculation, when all the philosophers in all ages of the world have been unable to find it by their wisdom? when it lies hid from most of them, even when before their eyes, and while they profess faith in the books that make the revelation? Shall impostors be the authors of a view of Divine mercy that gives no shelter to sin?

The wisdom of God shines also illustriously in the Gospel, by causing sin, which in itself is dishonorable to God, to redound to his glory. By tempting our first parents to sin, Satan meant to dishonor God, and mar his purpose. But God hath made the introduction of sin the means of the manifestation of his glory. The redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ was absolutely necessary for the full display of the Divine character. In no other way could his attributes have been practically ex-

hibited. In this way God showed himself to the world. The person and work of Jesus Christ revealed God to mankind. God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into the hearts of men, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The glory of God is seen in its highest exhibition in the person and work of his Son. The heavens indeed declare his glory, but the Gospel manifests a work more glorious than the creation. Can anything be more wonderful than this? Sin, the most hateful and apparently injurious thing to God, has served to manifest his glory! Could such a thought ever have entered the mind of man? Even when revealed, it remains hid to many. The salvation of the Gospel, is considered by many who profess it, as a kind of after-thought in God, the best possible reparation of an evil not capable of being entirely mended. Whence then could come the thought, that the entrance of sin was necessary to show God to be what he is?

The wisdom of God is also seen in the event of sin with respect to the redeemed. So far from ruining them, according to its natural tendency, it has issued in their infinitely greater happiness and glory. They are not restored to a happy life in an earthly paradise, but by being united unto God through Jesus, they are raised above all worlds, and shall reign with him forever. As Jesus has

overcome, and is set down on his Father's throne, they also shall sit down with him on his throne. Here is wisdom. The efforts of Satan to plunge men into the misery of hell, have issued in the raising of millions of them to the throne of God. Did ever such a thought originate with man? Compared with this, the loftiest conceptions of Plato dwindle into utter insignificance.

This scheme of salvation manifests the Divine wisdom also, inasmuch as it harmonizes confidence and humility; the former necessary for the peace of the Christian, the latter essential to a just sense of his own character. Yet these two things are in themselves inconsistent, and according to all other views of salvation, the one decreases by the increase of the other. If a man has a low opinion of his own merit, he can have little hope: if he has great confidence, he can possess little humility. "I do not see," said one, "why such a man as Dr. Price should not confide on the justice of the Deity as well as on his mercy." The high moral attainments of the sage come impudently to the bar of the Almighty, and demand a reward for justice. According to the view of the person who made use of this language, there was no scope for humility in this case. Now, the same is the tendency of the confidence of the devotee, and of confidence arising from every species of religious attainments. How very inconsistent this is with the real situation of

man, is abundantly obvious, even independent of revelation. Had Dr. Price been as pure as the throne of God, I defy reason to say, that God would have done him any injustice, had he annihilated him. A sinless being indeed justice cannot punish, but a sovereign God may take away that which he freely gave. His wisdom is a security against caprice, but let not angels dare to make God their debtor. The thought would hurl them into hell. But if there were any speck of sin in the philosopher (and every man not blinded by the influence of the god of this world, must know him to be a sinner), instead of confiding in justice, it is impossible in himself even to meet its claims. My reason tells me, that ten thousand years of uninterrupted virtue cannot cover a single offence. On this point, view the glory of the Gospel plan of salvation. It unites the utmost confidence with the greatest humility. Nay, humility is increased with the increase of confidence. A Christian is never so humble, as when he perceives most clearly the ground of confidence in the work of Christ. If the earth were on fire under his feet, were the heavens melting over his head, were the red right hand of justice stretched out to take vengeance on iniquity, clearly perceiving this character of God, he would possess his soul in peace. He would triumph in the view of the bar of God, yet at the same moment would be clothed with humility in proportion to his

confidence. He has no confidence in his own attainments: he sees himself utterly unworthy. He can indeed confide in justice as well as in mercy, but he has a Divine righteousness to meet Divine justice. The apostle Paul exclaims, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" yet in the same letter he declares, "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Here, then, is the harmony of contraries. Shall this wonderful depth of wisdom be ascribed to man, when all men but those taught by the apostles, consider these two things incompatible? Tell the world that you have great confidence of salvation, and every man will immediately reply, "Then you must have a very high opinion of yourself." If, then, the Gospel reveals a plan which gives the utmost confidence, not only without encouraging self-conceit, but in necessary union with the deepest humility, I conclude, as from an axiom, that the Gospel is from God.

LOVE.

The love of God is an attribute which shines most illustriously in the atonement. To die for a friend, is the highest instance of love among mankind; an instance scarcely found. But God commended his love to men, in that, while they were yet sinners, Christ died for them. Among all the ransomed of the Lord there is not one who is not naturally an enemy to him. There is not one of

the human race who does not hate this God, till he perceives his love in the atonement. You, sir, can need no proof from me that you hate the God of the Scriptures. Even this God of love you hate to such a degree, that you are willing to make yourself a sacrifice to defame him. You no doubt love your own god, but he is an idol: he is the creation of your own fancy. You love your god even for his imperfections. The God of the Scriptures you hate even for the perfection of his character. How enormous must be the hatred of Mr. Paine and you to this God, when you find debauchery in the holy records of the incarnation? To him that believes in a Being of almighty power, is there anything more incredible in the manner of the Saviour's conception, than in the ordinary production of man? Yet how does the malignity of your heart manifest itself with regard to this amazing instance of the infinite love and condescension of God! Now, had the Scriptures been the work of man, would they have represented, that the love of God was such that he gave his Son to suffer for such men as you? Would they ever speak of mercy to such enemies? Yet, thou blasphemer of the God of love, thou enemy of the incarnate Jehovah, to you does the Gospel proclaim mercy. The blood that you have trampled on was shed for such enemies. Should God change your mind to the acknowledgment of the truth, after all your blasphemies, you should

stand without spot before him in love, and reign with Jesus over all worlds. Here is love beyond anything that could ever have entered into the mind of man. So far from being the authors of such a view of Divine love, men cannot credit it when revealed in the Scriptures. Multitudes even of those called Christians, would hesitate in making the Divine love extend to you. Some of them would grudge you such mercy. Surely then such a view of the love of God must have come from heaven. It has no feature of the offspring of man. Now, sir, I entreat you to consider what is your guilt if this gospel is true. What must be your condemnation if you persist in opposing this God of love? If an infinitely just God will punish sin as it deserves, what must be the punishment of the man, who counteracts the purposes of Infinite Love, and labors with such zeal for the damnation of mankind!

Again, and again I entreat you, sir, to contemplate the love of God in the gift of his Son. This is the greatest possible instance that infinite love could give of itself. The gift of ten thousand worlds would have been nothing to this. God, even the infinite Jehovah, had nothing greater to give. Could the thought of such amazing love have originated in the mind of man!

But the most amazing thing with respect to this attribute, is the way in which the love of God can

extend to sinners. Love is a perfection when there is an object worthy of the affection; it may then be reasonably inferred that God loves whatever is lovely, but it may with great certainty be inferred that whatever is unamiable displeases him: reason then could never point out a way in which sinners could be a proper object of the Divine love; on the contrary, it declares, that they are objects worthy of his hatred. How is it then that God loves sinners who in themselves are infinitely unworthy of his love, and infinitely worthy of his hatred? Here the Scriptures make a discovery which reason could never have found out. They show us that God loves sinners; and they show us a way in which sinners are perfectly worthy of the Divine love. They do not bring to light a doctrine contrary to the fair deductions of reason, with regard to the proper objects of God's love: they do not tell us that God loves what reason tells us he ought to hate. We could not believe them were they to make such a report; but they tell us that God loves sinners; and that his wisdom has exhibited a way in which he has made them worthy of his love. In the death of Christ, the sins of his people are cancelled, and in their substitute they are as innocent as if they never had sinned; as they are united to Christ, and as his righteousness becomes theirs, they are more worthy of the Divine love, than they were in their original innocence.

Nay, as that righteousness is the righteousness of God, and as they become one with him who is a divine person, they are infinitely worthy of infinite love. Thus the Scriptures discover a way in which sinners are more worthy of Divine love than the angels that never fell; more worthy than they could have been in their original creation, had they been placed in the highest possible rank of created existence. Could such a thought have ever originated with man? Is there anything like this in all the wisdom of the wise men of this world? Is such a glorious discovery the invention of imposture? The man who can think so, is a miracle of obstinacy or stupidity. Could anything but Divine wisdom discover a plan in which persons worthy of infinite hatred, became worthy of infinite love? It is still true that God hates sinners in themselves, and all who are not viewed by him in the Lord Jesus Christ, will forever continue so. From eternity he loved his people, because from eternity he viewed them in union with his Son, their infinitely worthy Substitute.

THE TRINITY.

The Scriptural representations of a distinction of persons in the Godhead, appear to me to afford evidence of the truth. Had the Scriptures been an imposture, I see no reason why their author would have encumbered himself with such a view,

even had it in any way been presented to his mind. The history of the reception of this doctrine, as respects those who profess Christianity, supports me in asserting that it is not the offspring of human ingenuity: so great is the aversion to it, entertained by the pride of reason, that in opposition to the plainest and most numerous declarations of a book received as the Word of God, many find no such thing in the Scriptures. They cannot find a single decisive passage in all the Bible, to warrant the belief that Jesus Christ possesses supreme Godhead. Notwithstanding all that is taught on this point, by the writers whom they consider as giving a revelation from God, Jesus Christ is nothing but a mere man or an angel. If human wisdom exerts itself so violently to pervert what is so plainly written on the subject, it cannot be charged as having written it.

Again, even when the Divine nature of Jesus Christ is not denied, the apparent foolishness of the personal distinction in the Godhead, has been so felt, that various theories have been forced on the Scriptures compelling them to renounce this doctrine, and to admit that nothing more is meant than different characters, names, office, &c. Surely, then, had the Scriptures been the production of man, there was no motive to lead to such an exhibition of the Divine nature. There is every inducement to avoid it.

There is still additional evidence of the same thing from the conduct even of those who believe the above doctrine. Let any candid man compare what the Scriptures teach on this subject, and the manner in which they teach it, with the writings and decrees of men in favor of the same doctrine, and he must be convinced of the characteristic difference. The one is evidently the wisdom of man, and the other is evidently the wisdom of God. In this tract I suggest, rather than exhaust proof. But after a leisurely and full examination of the simple statements of Scripture on this point, and the indirect way in which it is brought forward, in contrast with the scholastic subtilties, the bold definitions, and blasphemous illustrations that human wisdom have employed to recommend this doctrine, it is impossible that candor can refuse to admit the former are of God. Had the doctrine of a distinction in the Godhead been an invention of man, it would have been taught in the style of human wisdom.

HOLINESS.

The atonement manifests also God's infinite holiness, and hatred of sin. How hateful must sin be to God when he punished it even to its utmost desert in the person of his own Son? Can infidelity, can philosophy, produce any such proof of God's displeasure at sin? Did ever any philoso-

pher conceive a God so holy as to punish every sin to its utmost desert? No, the god of philosophy is very moderate in his hatred of sin, and makes many allowances for human infirmity. He must accommodate himself to the necessities of his worshippers, otherwise, like Saturn, he will be dethroned. As human nature is bankrupt, he must give an acquittance for a reasonable composition: as men have such passions, he must indulge them in some occasional deviations from duty. He is like a good-natured old man, who himself has no relish for folly, but indulgently winks at the levities and indiscretions of youth. This, sir, I suppose is your god, and it is not strange that you should love him. But the infinitely holy God of the Scriptures has revealed his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Affliction and anguish are denounced as the portion of every one that doeth evil. The smallest violation of the Divine law subjects to the curse. Every sin of men and angels will be visited with punishment. Divine holiness is unsullied in the pardon of the sin of believers, nay, it is rendered infinitely more illustrious in the death of Christ. Now, sir, is an infinitely holy God the God of impostors? No, sir, he is the dread of the wise and virtuous, and cannot, herefore, be the delight of men who could have no refuge from his vengeance. If the highest human virtue dare not meet such a God, how

could deceivers escape his wrath? Here is an infinitely holy God, yet such a God is naturally the aversion of all men. It is then a self-evident truth that this character of God came from himself.

CONCLUSION.

Such, sir, are some of the attributes of the God of the Scriptures. What is your god to this God? Here is a God who must be the true God, because he is perfect in every attribute. That cannot be the true God, a greater than whom it is possible to conceive. That cannot be God, whose attributes are capable of additional perfection. Now, the god of the wisdom of this world is imperfect in many of his attributes, and I have here shown one infinitely perfect. Can it then be a question which of these is the true God? Shall imposture and ignorance invent an infinitely perfect God, while wisdom and virtue fail? Shall I give up my God, the harmony of whose attributes secures my salvation, for yours, who cannot look upon me with an eye of pity, without being at war with himself?

Then, sir, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. In it alone the character of the true God is manifested to the world. I cannot read a page of the Scriptures without seeing proofs that they are not the work of man; but the character of God manifested in the atonement, independent of all other proofs, demonstrates the truth of the Gospel.

It is intrinsically light. It is utterly impossible to understand it, and not believe it. It is impossible to see God, and not believe him to be God. But here God is seen. He that hath seen Jesus hath seen the Father. The glory of God shines in his face. The view of this perfect character overwhelms the soul with evidence irresistible as the light of heaven. A man may as well look upon the sun, and yet be uncertain whether he sees that luminary, as discern the harmony and infinite perfection of this character, and doubt whether this is the true God. This is the reason why the Gospel is called light in the Scriptures. This is the reason that the knowledge of God is represented as amounting to the same thing with the belief of it. It cannot be known without being credited. The plan of salvation here revealed, not only harmonizes the Divine attributes, but appears absolutely necessary for the practical illustration of the Divine character. Had sin never entered, mercy could have had no scope, justice could have had neither operation nor adequate reparation. Love would have wanted an opportunity of manifesting its infinite perfection. Sovereignty would have been totally hid. Holiness could not have been seen in the same strong light. Without the atonement, God could not have been seen in all the glory of his perfect character. It is not an after-thought to repair an evil that could not have been prevent-

ed. It is the only light in which the lustre of the Divine character could appear.

If, then, the knowledge of God is the noblest branch of philosophy, the Gospel is the most noble science in the world. Here alone is to be found the knowledge of the true God. Philosophers, as well as infidels, are in the habit of looking on Christians with contempt. It is the contempt of the rustic for the Copernican system. The weakest and most illiterate Christian knows more of the most excellent of all sciences, than the greatest philosopher who is ignorant of the Gospel. The Christian is the only man on earth who knows God. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For, after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

THE END.

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